Research Project | 2019

Understanding the Rural and Coastal Contexts in Widening Participation

The University of Cumbria-based research group Health and Society Knowledge Exchange (HASKE) developed a project examining the rural and coastal contexts of widening participation.

This research aimed to understand this topic in more detail by gathering data from localities in Cumbria in order to respond to the following questions:

- What constitutes a 'rural and/or coastal context' in relation to Widening Participation?
- How can the contextual dimensions of Widening Participation be understood and accounted for when outreach activities are delivered?
- What is the existing evidence for 'what works' for outreach activities in similar contexts outside of Cumbria?

The report will help to inform future outreach activities and evaluation by providing a detailed and nuanced account of the rural and coastal contexts from the perspective of young people, including recommendations that can be used by partners and the Hello Future central team to support outreach activities.

HASKE
Health & Society Knowledge Exchange

Working with hello future.
Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Programme

Hello Future have funded a number of research projects. Through the projects we aim to enable our partnership and wider stakeholders to learn more about our target Cumbrian learner cohort. Research projects are developed to capture 'learner voice', inform our evolving Theory of Change and to increasingly improve the effectiveness of our outreach interventions.

OfS Uni Connect Programme

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by Hello Future, and conducted by Health and Society Knowledge Exchange (HASKE) at the University of Cumbria.

The report authors are Dr Meaghan Grabrovaz and Dr Tom Grimwood, February 2019.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Context and Overview

Hello Future forms part of the Uni Connect programme funded by the Office for Students. The programme aims to drive rapid progress towards achieving the Government's goals to double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher Education (HE) by 2020, increase by 20 per cent the number of students in HE from ethnic minority groups and address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Hello Future territory comprises 24 target wards which fall into three distinct areas within Cumbria; Carlisle and Eden, the West Coast and Furness, and targets students who live in these wards and who are expected or have achieved GCSE attainment levels which will allow them to progress onto level 4 study in order to help achieve the targets set out by Government.

Hello Future currently uses POLAR 3 maps from the Office for Students (2019) to identify target wards in these areas (Figure 1). Participation by Local Area (POLAR) methodology was developed by HEFCE (now the Office for Students) to measure participation in HE and splits the population into five groups, assigned equally across five quintiles, where quintile 1 areas have the lowest rates of young participation and quintile 5 areas have the highest rates.
The methodology then classifies each geographical area in the UK into one of these POLAR 1 to 5 quintiles, according to the participation rate of the estimated population of young people in that area. The participation rate is calculated by dividing the number of young people in each area who enter HE aged 18 or 19 by the estimated cohort population in that area. The geographical area used by POLAR 3 was the census area statistic ward.

POLAR 4 methodology has replaced POLAR 3 since October 2017 and differs from POLAR 3 in two ways: 1) a change in the methodology used to estimate populations and 2) using a lower geographical level (Middle Layer Super Output Areas, MSOAs, Office for National Statistics, 2019) to align with population geography levels published by UK statistical bodies. POLAR 4 also provides the most recent available data, 2009-10 to 2014-15 academic years (HEFCE, 2017, pp. 7; 15). POLAR 4 maps of wards in the Cumbrian study areas are provided at Figure 2, however comparison between the two may not be meaningful because areas in the two different geography classifications overlap. Changes in the participation level in some places may therefore be due the different geography area(s) used or actual changes in participation levels, particularly at the boundaries of areas with very different participation rates.

As part of this work, Hello Future commissioned Health and Social Care Evaluations (HASCE) at the University of Cumbria to conduct research into what constituted a 'rural' and/or 'coastal' context for young people, particularly in terms of what features of this context were most significant for their participation in HE.

While much literature exists on the challenges for 'hard-to-reach' groups accessing HE, the full significance of rural and coastal contexts – what constitutes this context, how it affects young people's view of accessing HE, which dimensions of context are more decisive than others, and so on – often remains under-explored. While Widening Participation strategies frequently invoke certain, well-established dimensions (such as POLAR quintile and first attenders), other dimensions such as local infrastructure, community provision and scale of local social networks may also play a role in the formation of the rural context.

This research therefore aimed to understand this in more detail by gathering data from localities in Cumbria in order to respond to the following questions:

- What constitutes a ‘rural and/or coastal context’ in relation to Widening Participation?

- How can the contextual dimensions of Widening Participation be understood and accounted for when outreach activities are delivered?

- What is the existing evidence for 'what works' for outreach activities in similar contexts outside of Cumbria?

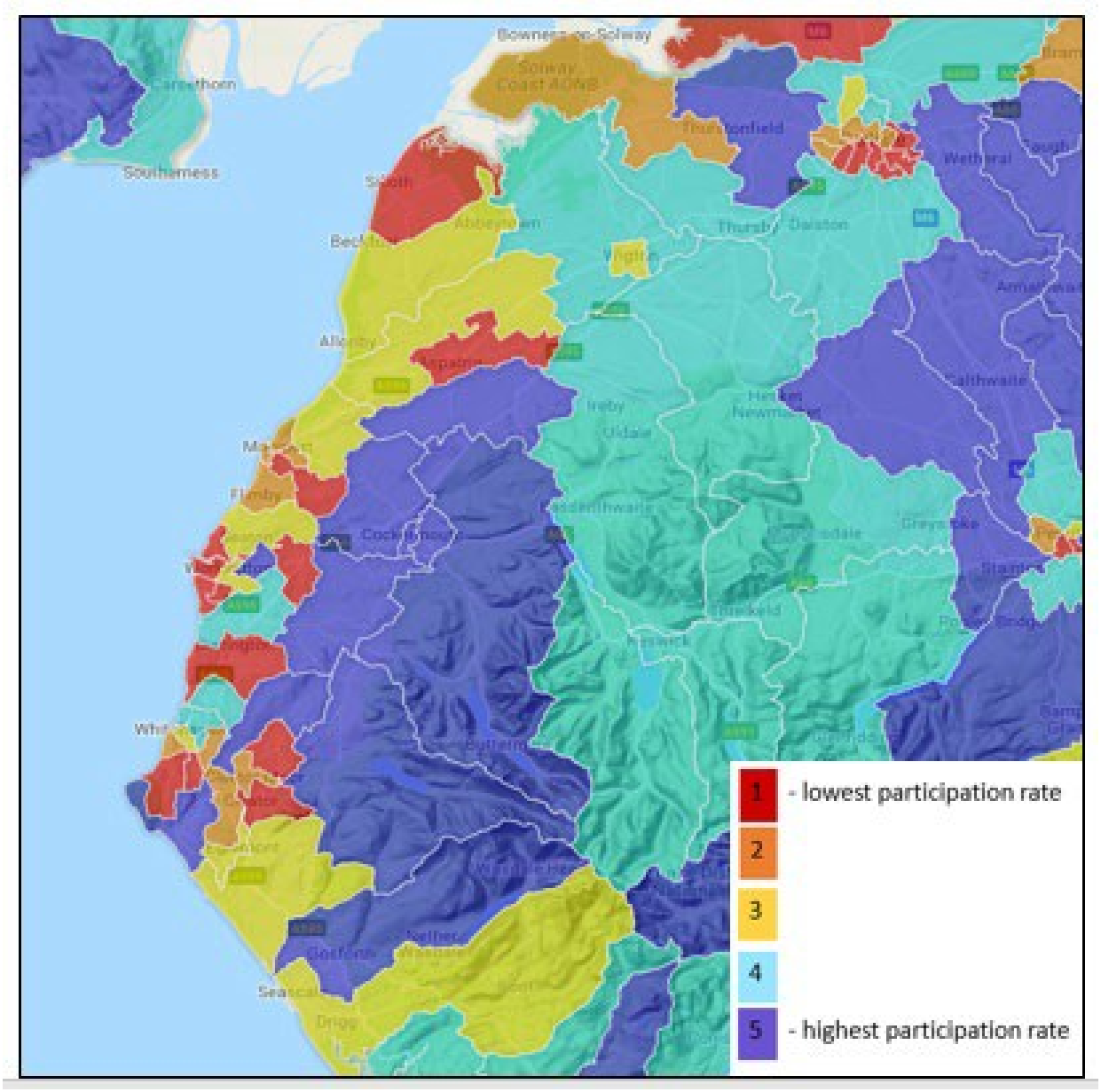

Figure 1. HE participation rates in Cumbria using POLAR 3 classification methodology

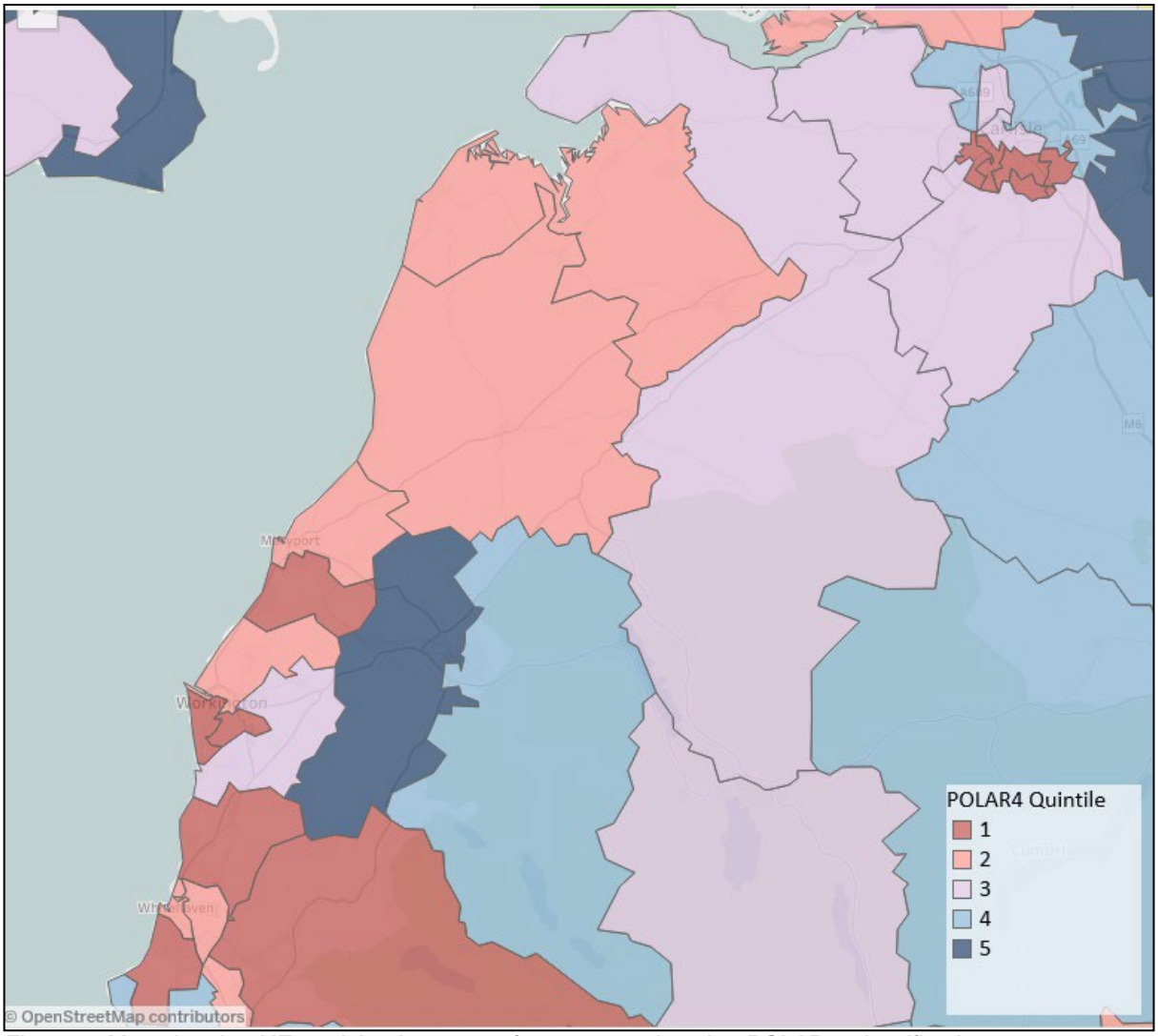

Figure 2. Map showing HE participation rates of young people using POLAR 4 classification

1.2 What is rural?

In the UK, rural and urban settlements are defined for policy purposes by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Department for Local Government and Communities (DLGC) and Office for National Statistics (ONS) on two dimensions: 1) population and 2) context (pp. 4-5, (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

Physical settlements with populations greater than 10,000 are generally defined as urban, those below as rural. Density profiles (population density over increasing distance scales) are used to classify settlement types e.g. hamlet, village, town, city.

On these definitions, a rural 'context' refers to the accessibility of a settlement, the sparsity of population within a broad area and the potential costs of overcoming distance to supply that settlement with various public and private services.

Under this classification scheme, Cumbria is classified as mainly rural (**Error! Reference source not found.**), with urban areas to the north, Carlisle, and south, Barrow-in-Furness (Figure 4). It is the second largest county in England with an area of 6,767 km sq (Cumbria Observatory, 2018), the second most sparsely populated county in England and home to some of England's highest mountains and largest lakes.

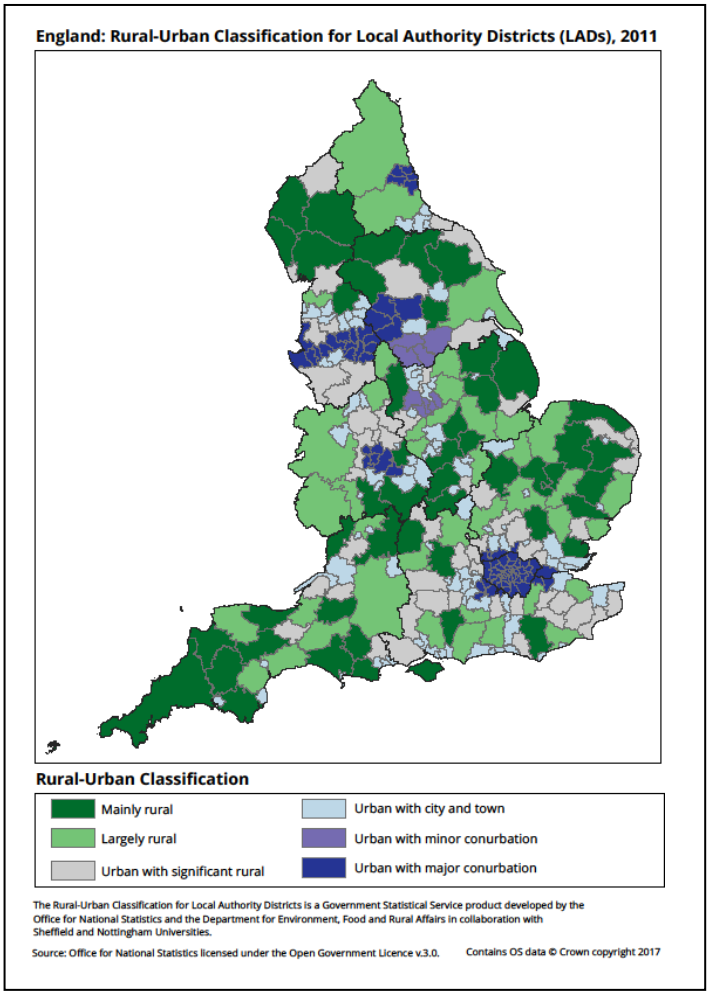

Figure 3. Rural-urban classification for Local Authority Districts in England, 2011

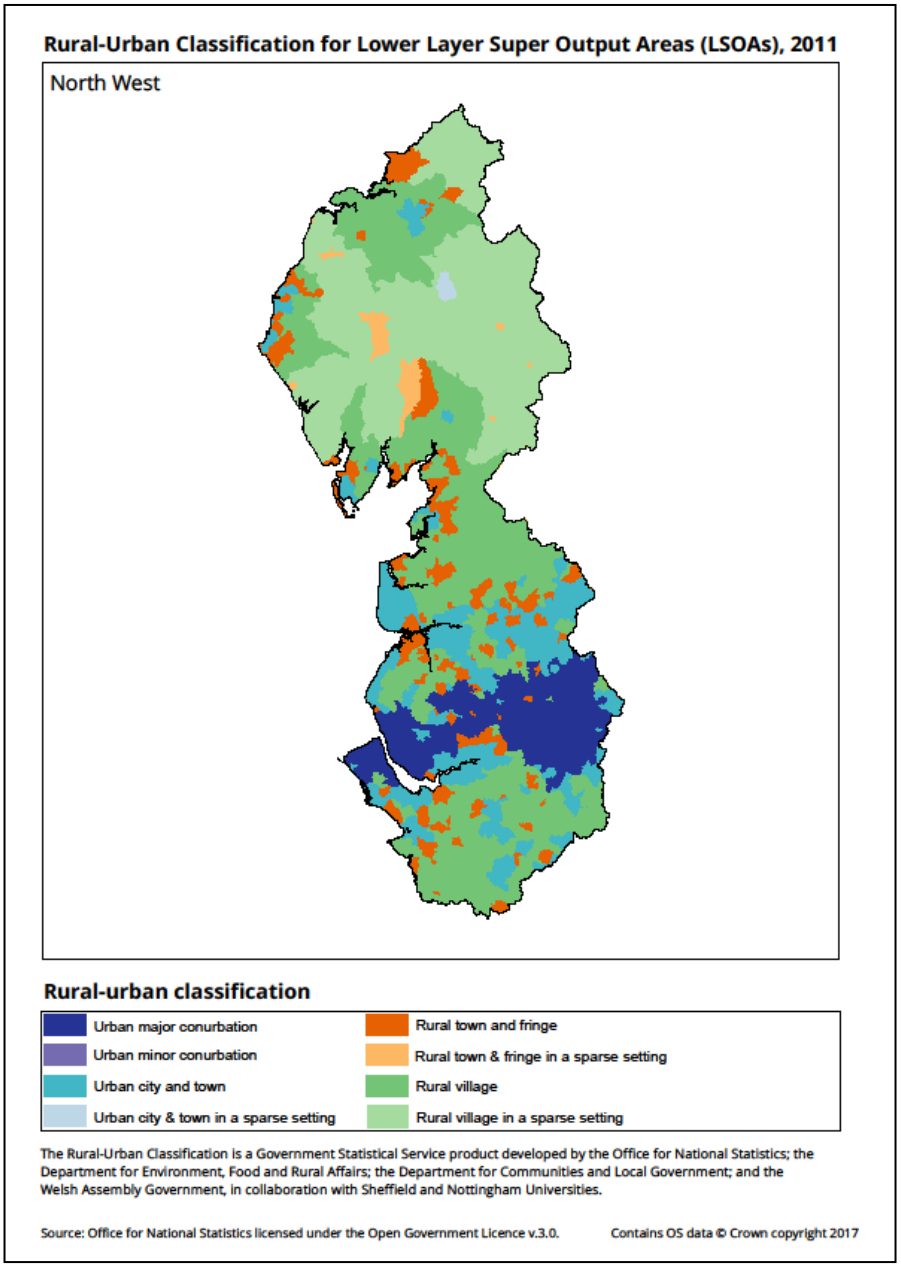

Figure 4. Rural-urban classification of North West Lower Layer Super Output Areas, 2011

Corbett (2014, p. 5) notes that rurality is a well-established social science population classification, often used to explain differences in economic advantage and educational achievement. The cause of decline in rural places is associated with the decline of traditional rural economic activities, which triggers a population loss from rural areas as people move elsewhere, often to urban areas in search of work (Corbett, 2016, p. 272).

However, Corbett also reports a contrasting view from the perspective of rural people who view 'rural communities and the producers who live in them as the backbone of the society' (2006, p. 287). From this perspective, urban spaces are regarded as full of non-productive people who know little about fundamental work of sustenance or production, who would not be able to cope in the 'real world'. From this perspective, rural people may regard themselves as having a higher 'value' than urban people or people from 'elsewhere, irrespective of income levels.

URBAN	RURAL
Concentrated population	Dispersed population
Organised and varied transport links	More reliance upon private transport
Other infrastructure is available – shops, youth centres, sports facilities	Very little infrastructure
Several HE providers, often competing	One University
A range of businesses, including wealthy multinationals, with a remit to offer support to challenged schools	A dominance of small to medium enterprises with no resource to offer support.
A range of third sector organisations available to supplement state WP activities	Third sector business models are unusually not suited to the demographic and geographical conditions of dispersed communities
A highly mobile population	A strong attachment to place, to local communities in local families.
A diverse age range of population	An increasingly aged population, counter urbanisation. Population growth decreasing.
Ethnic diversity	White British local community with some significant immigration from specific hard-to- track European groups
Though employment prospects for young people everywhere are diminished, urban centres tend to present a range of opportunities to work with a mix of larger and smaller companies offering starter jobs.	Apart from one dominant industry, public sector employers and agriculture, mostly SMEs serving tourist and service industries, often with no prospects for promotion and much sessional and zero hours work. Fewer work experience opportunities

Table 1 Difference between urban and rural/coastal settings of relevance to Widening Participation in Higher Education (adapted from IntoUniversity 2015, p.64

Table 1. summarises how urban and rural areas differ in relation to WP in HE.

1.3 What is coastal?

Despite calls for recognition of the specific features of coastal communities, there is no specific 'coastal' category, equivalent to rural and urban categories, in key central government policy formulation and reporting (Coastal Communities Alliance, 2010, p. III). The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee (2007) identified that coastal towns share unique characteristics that differentiate them from those of inland communities including:

- distinctive physical features and landscapes
- physical and social isolation
- high proportions of older people together with higher levels of outward migration among young people
- low-wage, low-skill economies and seasonality of employment
- frequent dependency on a single industry
- a high incidence of poor housing conditions and a high proportion of private rented homes.

The Coastal Communities Alliance, a partnership of coastal Local Authorities, coastal organisations and individuals with an interest in coastal matters, distinguishes coastal towns, from towns 'on the coast' or

administrative areas that have a stretch of tidal waters within its boundaries (which would include large

parts of London). Thus, they consider ‘coastal towns’ to be those whose ‘economy and identity depends, and has depended, to a significant extent on seaside tourism, and the extended influence of a seaside tourism tradition on related activities or identities (commuting, retirement, fishing and maritime heritage)’ (Coastal Communities Alliance, 2010, p. 14).

Broadly, coastal towns for economic and social research purposes can be taken as one of the 43 principal seaside towns on Beatty and Fothergill’s list (2003, p. 13), defined as ‘seaside resorts, rather than everywhere that happens to be by the sea. Ports, industrial towns by the sea, and purely residential settlements with little resort function have therefore been excluded.’ They also excluded coastal towns with populations less than 8,000 in 1971.

Places with commercial shipyards, like Barrow-in-Furness, and towns like Workington, Maryport and Whitehaven, whose past prosperity came mainly from coal exports and heavy industry, are thus regarded as towns that are ‘on the coast’, rather than coastal towns. Although Silloth has a history as a Victorian seaside resort, it was created as a port for Carlisle by the Carlisle & Silloth Bay Railway & Dock Co. in 1854 (Cumbria County History Trust, 2019). The seaside resort activities were developed to generate additional income to fill the gaps in the port revenue. In 2015, Silloth had a population of 3,297 (Table 4).

Thus, for the purposes of this report, although some target wards and schools were located on the coast, the concept of ‘coastal towns’ (which is associated predominantly with seaside resorts and tourism and therefore urban environments) did not feature in data collection and analysis. However, research on coastal communities e.g. Corbett’s studies of remote, coastal fishing communities in Nova Scotia, Canada, was included in the literature review, where dimensions of context shared similarities with the West Cumbrian situation (rural and remote).

2 Methodology

2.1 Literature Review

Current academic research and grey literature on dimensions of context within WP recruitment in rural, remote, regional areas was reviewed, with particular relevance to similarities between existing research and North-West Cumbria. An initial search strategy focused on academic and grey literature in the last five years (2013-2018) and was conducted using the search terms listed below (including combinations of all terms with both 'AND' 'OR' operands; contractions and variations with wild cards, synonyms, alternative spellings):

- Widening participation
- Higher education
- Access
- Cumbria
- Rural
- Remote
- Coastal
- Regional

Abstracts and titles of papers identified in this first screening were reviewed to identify papers for full-text retrieval. References in these papers were used to identify further relevant research which expanded the date parameters of the search.

Full text analysis identified further relevant papers which were synthesised using a descriptive narrative approach and organised into eight themes relevant to WP in rural areas:

- HE participation
- Educational aspirations and expectations
- Parental aspirations and expectations
- Educational attainment
- Financial costs, debt and value of a degree
- Social and cultural capital in rural areas
- Gender
- Distance

A total of 73 sources (papers, reports and websites) between the years 1973 and 2019 were reviewed and synthesised.

Academic and grey literature were also searched to identify contextual information, specific to the Cumbrian context and the results synthesised using a descriptive narrative approach, organised around eight themes:.

- Boundaries of West Cumbria
- Characteristics of rural and coastal West Cumbria
- Distance
- Travel
- Aspirations of young people in rural Cumbria
- Socio-economic deprivation in West Cumbria
- School ability to support HE aspirations
- Economy and job market of West Cumbria

2.2 Focus Groups with young people

The literature review identified key areas for data collection using existing data on HE attendance, socio-economic demographics and local infrastructure information, to draw up a comparative 'context map' . This allowed the researchers to target 4 wards (Table 2) for in-depth qualitative data collection.

Area	Local authority	Ward	Total population (estimate 2015)	% economically active (ONS Census 2011)	% No qualifications (ONS Census 2011)	% level 4 qualification and above (ONS Census 2011)
Cumbria			497,996	80.1	24.2	24.6
West Coast	Allerdale	Aspatria*	3,429	68.8	30.7	16
	Copeland	Distington*	3,993	66.5	31.4	14.6
	Copeland	Frizington*	2,623	64.4	30.6	18.3
	Allerdale	Silloth*	3,297	62.9	32.9	18.3

Table 2. Demographic and educational qualification statistics for Hello Future wards in West Cumbria (adapted from Hello Future Evaluation Plan, 2018) (* wards included in this study)

Three focus groups were held at three schools between November 2018-January 2019. School staff, who Hello Future TURE liaised with as part of their regular outreach activities, were asked to identify and invite males and females, living in the target wards, aged between 15 and 17 years old, in Years 11 and 12, although at one school three Year 13 participants turned up on the day. A total of 13 young people participated in focus groups.

Only one focus group included male participants (male participants were invited to all focus groups but did not attend two of the three focus groups). This focus group was held in a school specialising in engineering pathways to HE and apprenticeships. Students and their families have to choose to change schools during Year 9 in order to start at the beginning of Year 10 (Year 12 entry is also available). Thus, students and their families at this school have already made significant decisions about education and progression and are a self-selected sub-group of people orientated towards engineering and apprenticeship routes. The school gender balance, 70% male; 30% female, differs noticeably from other schools in the area (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Thus, the views of males and females from this group may be unrepresentative of other West Cumbrian young people.

2.3 Outreach, education and education-related professionals

Supplementary data about the enablers and barriers to accessing HE were collected from outreach practitioners, education and education-related professionals, attending an outreach programme review event, hosted by Hello Future in December 2018. This data complemented national and international findings from the literature by providing specific information about the Cumbrian context. It also enabled comparison with data collected from young people to explore differences and similarities to inform consideration of how outreach activities are delivered.

A stand at the event enabled attendees to browse project information and talk to the researcher. Participants who visited the stand were a mix of ages, genders and backgrounds e.g. outreach practitioners, staff from wider educational/careers organisations; local authority education and social care workers who work in collaboration with Hello Future and/or support HE progression in Cumbria. Participants who opted-in to the data collection exercise were asked to note down 'Enablers' and/or 'Barriers' on coloured sticky notes (green 'Enablers' and orange for 'Barriers.

The aim of this data collection was to gather brief answers (single to a few words) from a range of relevant practitioners and professionals to two single questions: what do you think are the enablers and/or barriers? The use of sticky notes offered an inclusive method of participation (Peterson and Barron 2007) and maximised the potential for collecting and analysing data from a larger number of people. A summary of data collected is provided in Annex 1. Supplementary semi-structured interviews were conducted with outreach staff working in the study area and in a comparable location in northern Scotland which shares features such as remoteness, distance, employment and economic structure, low participation in HE.

3 Literature review (1): Widening Participation in Rural Contexts

3.1 Low participation and aspiration

In the UK, many of England's lowest HE participation rates occur in rural, dispersed and coastal locations (IntoUniversity, 2015, p. 4), including on the west coast of Cumbria. Lower rates of participation in HE in rural, dispersed and/or coastal areas are often conceptualised using what Archer (2007), amongst others, have termed the 'deficit model'. Under this model, widening participation' has individualised and pathologised lack of participation as though it is due to a deficit, a lack of ambition, aspiration or knowledge of the student, rather than as a result of structural or institutional inequalities which make higher education unthinkable for many; an approach reflected in UK government policy which identifies 'low aspirations' as a key barrier to educational attainment and social mobility (Baker et al. 2014). Under this deficit model, low rates of HE participation are often ascribed to lower quality of school education, lower aspirations of rural young people and their families, rural culture and values that do not value education (e.g. p. v, Spielhofer et al., 2011; p. 65, Howley, 2006).

Rural education policy and the role of WP activities in this model seeks to redress 'rural deficit', premised on the assumption that participation in Higher Education enhances social mobility, enabling participants to secure a 'better' or 'well-paid' job. The fact that these jobs are often located in urban areas is a somewhat silent 'taken-for-granted' aspect of social mobility. Indeed, there is a prevailing discourse associated with mobility which suggests that as travel and global communications have intensified, geographic and social mobility is commonplace, and that young people, especially, now have mobile lives (e.g. Elliot & Urry, 2010). For example, in its report on "*Working in Partnership: enabling social mobility in UK Universities*" (Universities UK, 2016, p. 1) the Social Mobility Awareness Group sets out its beliefs as to the nature and benefits of social mobility:

> 'Universities transform lives. Going to University leads to new ways of seeing the world, to new horizons and networks, and to significantly enhanced job opportunities.'

The primacy of increasing potential earnings as a desirable objective and the location of these 'elsewhere' is so ingrained in this vision that it leads to an implicit link between the objectives of rural education and a rural exodus (Corbett, 2016, p. 271).

Corbett (2016, p. 275) argues that the deficit model arises from a neoliberal educational discourse of aspiration and has, in fact, become a form of 'victim blaming', Thus, problems such as low rates of retention in schools or low participation in HE are problematised as 'low aspirations' that need 'raising' (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 229). Critics of this deficit discourse, however, query whether people who form social groupings, e.g. people in low socio-economic categories or geographical areas, are there because as individuals they all lack the drive and ambition to 'succeed' or whether it is because people have not had the opportunity to 'succeed' (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 229).

However, who decides and defines what is deemed as educational and economic 'success' is itself contested. For example, research in rural, remote, dispersed and/or coastal areas in Australia and Canada suggests that rural youths' aspirations for HE education may be similar (or even higher) than their urban counterparts. However, attainment differs because rural youth make deliberate and legitimate choices to commit to place and rural lifeways, electing to 'fit' their educational careers to the economic opportunities available in the area in which they wish to stay (Howley, 2006, p. 63).

One definition of aspiration, 'the capacity to imagine futures' (Sellar and Gale, 2011. p. 122), captures the

importance of the past, present and future components of aspiration (Webb at al., 2015):

- Experiences of schooling and level of school attainment as well as those of peers;
- Knowledge, awareness of and exposure to post-school education and career opportunities;
- Parental, family and community views on education and career;
- Availability of information, advice and guidance (IAG) in relation to post-school transitions;
- Socio-economic status;
- Parental levels of educational attainment;
- Cost of further qualifications, including the opportunity cost associated with further study instead of employment;
- Availability of transport;
- Local economic conditions and employment opportunities.

A narrow focus on aspiration as equating to higher paid jobs through higher education may overlook place-based interpretations of what constitutes appropriate aspiration and attainment (Spielhofer et al., 2011, p. 26). Defining aspiration as 'aiming for HE', excludes the important social benefits young people may gain by belonging to rural communities; for example, connection to place has been shown to provide young people with a significant sense of identity, commitment and social connection (Howley, 2006,p. 63). For rural young people, planning to remain in one's local community may be an important component of aspiration, overlooked by WP policies and practice, and which too often reinforces a 'rurality deficit' stereotype (Webb et al., 2015, p. 35).

3.2 Parental aspirations and expectations

Research has also identified two other key distinctions in the formation of young people's educational aspirations. Firstly, the difference between what young people 'want' to happen in the future and what they 'expect' will happen, and secondly, the difference between young people's own aspirations and expectations and those of their parents (Baars et al., 2016, p. 14).

Expectation has been described as differing from aspiration because it is the "the extent to which factors affecting aspiration interact with a student's prior achievement and perceptions of accessibility and availability of places in higher education to shape their perceptions of the likelihood of entry" (Koshy et al., 2017, p. 2) summarised in Figure 5.

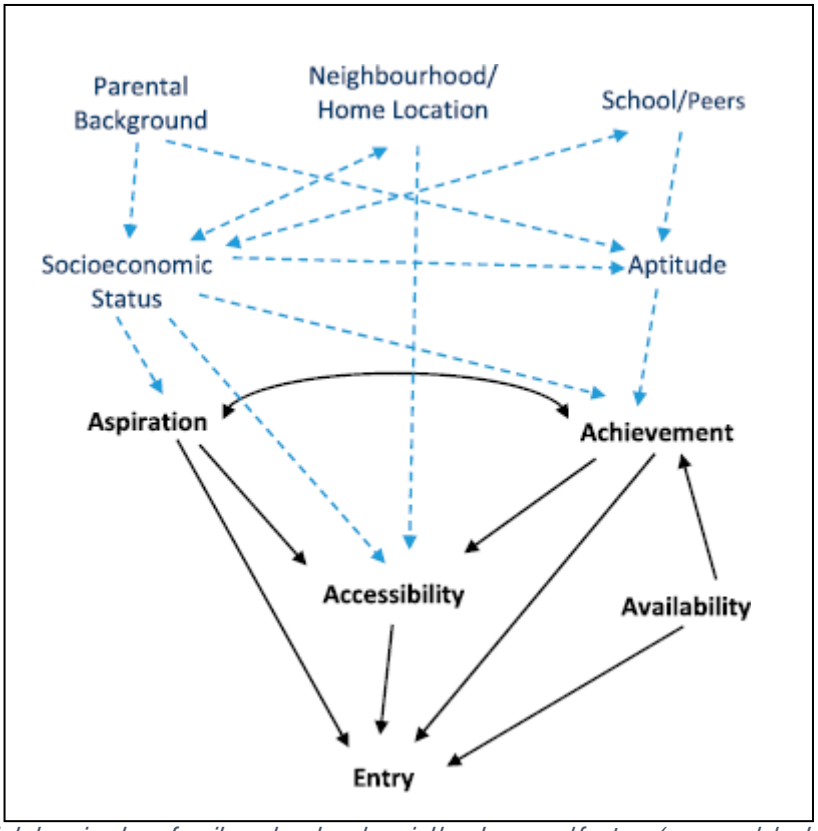

Figure 5. Expectation model showing how family, school and social background factors (grey and dashed lines) interact with factors affecting student navigation of the higher education system (black and solid lines) (from Koshy et al., 2017, p. 2).

Parental expectations are formed through parental assessment of children's ability coupled with their own educational and occupational backgrounds and are an important, long-term determinant of young people's decision-making about participating in HE (Koshy et al., 2017, pp. 2; 11). In one study, young people whose parents expressed a preference for them to attend University, were 11 times more likely to do so (Gemici et al., 2014, p. 127).

Parental expectations have been shown to be influenced by parental educational attainment; sociological factors such as parental occupational status, family structure and ethnicity; family income and wealth; parental assessments of children's school performance and gender of both parent and child (ibid.). For example, in the UK, Goodman and Gregg (2010) found that 37% of low-SES mothers wanted their 9-year-old to go to University compared to 81% of high-SES mothers.

Over time, parent's assessments of their child's abilities, together with a knowledge of likely options translates aspirations into expectations as the child grows older. For example, in one study 97% of all parents, when their children were born, expressed that they wanted their children to go to University, however, by the time the child was aged 14-years-old, 53% of low-income parents and 81% of high-income parents expected that their child would go to University (Education Committee Report, 2013 cited Baars. et al., 2016, p. 14).

Research in Australia into raising HE participation of rural and regional young people, found that rural young people from low socio-economic status (SES) areas, were more likely to experience different (and negative) family and community attitudes towards higher education than young people from the same location but with higher SES backgrounds (Fleming and Grace, 2014, p. 484). For example, lower SES families were more likely to emphasise financial and distance barriers compared to higher SES families from the same location and more likely to query the relevance of further study (DEEWR, 2010). However, any support from parents, even those without direct experience of University education, has been shown to be an important part of the support structure in building young people's capability to continue with education and learning (Webb et al., 2015, p. 50).

Gender effects on parent and community aspirations for young people's participation in HE can vary according to the gender of parents, children, location and marital status. For example, research in Australia showed that in locations where young females face more limited post -school vocational education and training pathways than males, parents, and particularly, mothers, have higher expectations for their daughters to pursue higher education (Koshy et al., 2017, p. 11).

Webb et al.'s (2015) research in Australia into the effects of geographical place on young people's aspirations identified a link between mothers' educational qualifications (especially University qualifications) and the University intentions of participants. Thus, mothers were particularly influential in the career aspirations and decisions of some young women. However, for others, family influences actually discouraged further study by placing much greater value on getting married and having children.

Webb et al., (2015, p. 39) also found that family influence and gendered role modelling was a strong influence on boys, who often followed in the traditions associated with their locality and their families, especially the employment history of their fathers in that locality but also brothers and other key male figures. Furthermore, white working class boys and their parents are more likely to prioritise swift entry into paid work over further study (Baars et al., 2016, p. 34). A study of the under-representation of white, working-class boys in HE in the UK concluded that a key challenge for WP is to intervene sufficiently early, indeed from the earliest days of primary school, in order to shift perceptions of HE, contribute to aspiration formation and support the required level of educational attainment (Baars et al., 2016, p. 6). Apprenticeships in particular, are attractive to both boys and parents from disadvantaged backgrounds because they overcome the perceived financial risks attached to higher education whilst enabling young people to earn money, avoid debt and gain practical skills and experience (Baars et al., 2016, pp. 20-21).

In summary then, aspiration and expectation formation starts early, is dynamic and is significantly influenced by place, parents and gender.

3.3 Educational attainment

Despite low aspiration appearing as a theme in much Education and Widening Participation policy, research into HE participation suggests that attainment is far more significant problem than aspiration. Although aspirations and expectations for HE do vary between families from high and low SES groups, both are generally high among both primary and secondary school parents and children, across all SES backgrounds (Goodman and Gregg, 2010, p. 37). For example, at age 14, far more parents and children reported that they were likely to go on to HE than eventually do go, across all income backgrounds - 81% of parents from high SES groups and 53% of parents from low SES groups think their children are likely to go to University whereas 52% and 12.5% subsequently do (Goodman and Gregg, 2010, p. 36). Thus, the issue for education and WP policy and practice is how to convert high expectations and aspirations into attainment.

Extensive research in education studies has found a strong relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and educational attainment in England and elsewhere (e.g. Strand, 2014, p. 132; Goodman and Gregg, 2010, p. 5). Indeed, low SES familial background impacts on future life chances, including participation in HE, even when prior educational attainment is high (Marshall, 2002 cited in Baars et al., 2016, p. 12). However, in a longitudinal study of educational achievement of over 15,000 young people in the England, Strand (2014) demonstrated that it is the interactions of ethnicity, gender and SES rather than simple additive causal effects that matter most, and particularly, significant interactions between ethnicity and SES and ethnicity and gender.

The lowest performing group in the UK are white working class school students (Strand, 2014, p. 134). The gap between low SES white British students and their peers from other ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic groups already exists at age five and continues to widen throughout compulsory education (Baars et al., 2016, p. 12). Furthermore, research suggests that attainment is lowest when

poverty persists across generations (Goodman and Gregg, 2010, pp. 44-50).

Another aspect of educational attainment in rural areas is the capacity of schools and the local area to support students' aspirations and attainment. For example, in a national study of what young people themselves regarded as barriers to their aspirations and expectations in rural Australia, young people identified issues such as the availability of specialist teachers; the range of subjects choices; the quality of subject offerings; recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas; and the range of extra-curricular opportunities available. Offsetting some of these disadvantages they also talked about the advantages or rural schooling including close attention and relationships and connectedness to community and the local environment (Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 52).

In a study of young people's aspirations in rural areas in the UK, including Cumbria, parents identified limited accessibility to a full range of courses and the distance young people might have to travel to access specific subjects, if they were available at all (Spielhofer, 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, parents and education professionals in this study noted the lack of a wide variety of occupations and industries in their local areas, limiting the opportunities for young people to aspire to (including the absence of culture and media businesses in Cumbria) (ibid.). Related to this were limited opportunities for young people to gain work experience, for example, through Saturday or holiday jobs which disadvantaged them in entering the job market later on as employers often favoured recruits with work experience.

3.4 Financial costs, debt and the value of a degree

The costs for students associated with studying for a degree have changed significantly in England since tuition fees rose to £9,000 in 2012/13 (p. 5, Bolton, 2017a) and maintenance grants were replaced by maintenance loans in 2016/17 (p. 6, Bolton, 2017b). Annual tuition fees of £9,250 (since 2017/18) (Bolton, 2017a, p. 5), together with average student maintenance loans of £5,470 in 2017/18 (Student Loans Company, 2018), mean that the average student debt for the poorest 40 percent of students has risen from £40,500 (Britton, Crawford, and Dearden, 2015, p. 2) to around £53,000 (at 2016 prices) (Bolton, 2017a, p. 11).

Despite an initial decrease in applicant numbers in 2012 (7.6% decrease in total applications), HE application rates among 18-year-olds from England actually increased in 2018 to a new record of 37.4% (compared to the previous January 2017), although the actual number decreased somewhat by 1.6%, due in part to the fall in numbers of 18 year olds in the population (Bolton, 2018, p. 8). Within these total numbers, application rates from 'disadvantaged' applicants[1], (variously categorised as those from POLAR 1 or 2 areas, those eligible for Free School meals, MEM groups 1 and 2 – have also continued to rise (Bolton, 2018, p. 9).

However, Callender and Mason (2017, p. 41) argue that debt aversion – "an unwillingness to take a loan to pay for college, even when that loan would likely offer a positive long-term return" (Cunningham and Santiago, 2008, p. 10 cited in Callender and Mason, 2017) – remains a deterrent for working-class students, more so than students from other social classes. In addition to fear or stigma around debt, research with disadvantaged or under-represented groups suggests that young people from these groups are more concerned whether they will see a return on their investment, rather than the direct financial costs of HE (Bowes et al., 2015, p. 14). Thus disadvantaged students who did decide to pursue University

study, felt they had not been deterred by fee and maintenance costs. In contrast, those who decided not to pursue HE cited cost as the determining factor as being 'not worth the risk' since there was no guarantee of a job at the end of it, or (more frequently) if they were not exactly sure of what they wanted to study or achieve by entering higher education (Bowes et al., 2015, p. 14).

In rural areas where few family members progress onto post-compulsory education (PCE) or have HE qualifications, an absence of role models in the community and a range of views to challenge family and community traditions can mean that HE is unfamiliar, and less valued (Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 51). However, HE can also be less valuable in some rural and coastal areas with specific types of economic activity e.g. farming, logging, mining, manufacturing and fishing, which traditionally have not required higher education for entry (Tieken, 2016, p. 205; Corbett, 2004, p.255). Instead, the development of the skills, knowledge and experience required have typically been acquired by learning 'on the job', from family and community connections and getting a head start as early as possible can be crucial (Corbett, 2004, p. 455). Access to these networks is more valuable in these situations than pursuing formal education and the prospect of leaving the community to pursue HE, together with the associated risk of severing of ties with economic and social networks, can make HE seem a rationally poor choice. Even in rural communities, where traditional industries have declined, or in areas where access to status, jobs and earnings is gendered or otherwise closed to certain groups, the aspirations of rural youth to maintain connections to family, community and rural lifestyle may be higher than those related to pursuing more individualistic and materialistic goals such as making as much money as possible (Howley 2006).

Thus, practical routes into a skilled trade (such as apprenticeships) can be more appealing in rural communities, particularly to males, because the financial benefits are realised more immediately and with greater certainty than those that might accrue from a higher education course (Baars et al., 2016, p. 13).

3.5 Social and cultural capital in rural areas

Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) developed theoretical concepts of 'social capital' and 'cultural capital', based on observations of the benefits that accrued to individuals or families from their social ties. These concepts have subsequently been much developed and used in social and educational research to explain, and attempt to manage, social, educational and economic differences in society (Byun et al., 2012, p. 357).

Social capital refers to the resources that people gain from being a part of a network of social relationships and is acquired through people's connections to groups and networks. Different interpretations of social capital by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam have emphasised different aspects and effects of social capital (and have been differentially adopted by various ideologies e.g. neo-liberalism) but the meaning of social capital can be captured as 'it's not what you know, it's who you know', (Giorgas, 2017, p. 207).

Cultural capital refers to social assets (ie non-economic assets) that promote social mobility beyond economic means and can be built through education, as this increases knowledge, skills and experience. Cultural capital is widely considered to be largely inherited from the family and has been found to be indicative of future educational outcomes, thus there is a link between cultural capital, higher education and aspiration (Turner, 2017, pp.95-96). Family cultural capital, defined as the status, class, and cultural tastes of a person inherited from their family (Vichie, 2017 cited in Turner, 2017. p. 95) is therefore considered a key influence on decision-making by young people about their end of PCE choices.

Subsequent research (e.g. Smith et al., 1995; Israel et al., 2001; 2004 cited in Byun et al., 2012, p. 357) has refined Coleman's notion of social capital by identifying different levels (i.e., family and school) and different components, structural and process (Byun et al., 2012, p. 359). Granovetter (1973; 1983) distinguished between strong ties (family, friends, colleagues) and weak ties (acquaintances), and suggested that weak ties that link different networks together are often more important in providing opportunities for gaining life advantages (Vella-Burrows et al., 2014, p. 13). A common typology of social capital summarises the location and effect of different types of social capital:

- Bonding social capital are strong ties between members of a social network, in similar situations. 'Horizontal relationships' between family, friends and neighbours which are useful for "getting by" in life.

- Bridging social capital are more distant 'weak ties' between members of different social networks. These ties provide access to contacts, information and resources essential for "getting ahead" in life.

- Linking social capital are 'vertical ties' between groups with different levels of influence and power which allow access to and leverage of a greater range of resources than those available within any one community (adapted from Woolcock, 200, pp. 13-14, cited in Vella-Burrows et al., 2014, p.13).

The concept of family social capital (the relationships among family members and especially parents and children), has been refined to include structural aspects such as single-parent or two-parent families, and the number of siblings, which determines the opportunity, frequency, and duration of parent-child interactions (Byun et al., 2012, p. 358).

Process aspects include interactions, such as parent-child discussion, parental involvement in their adolescent's schooling, and parental educational expectations (ibid.). Both structural and process aspects have been found to influence young people's decision-making about PCE choices (e.g. Smith et al., 1995; Israel et al., 2001; 2004 cited in Byun et al., 2012, p. 357). For example, Byun et al.'s (2012) project found that those rural young people who talked about their plans with their family had higher educational aspirations than those who do not (p. 372).

However, this research also suggested that the unique features of rural settings moderate the effects of structural and process aspects of family social capital. Thus, structural aspects, such as number of siblings, eligibility for free school meals, minority ethnicity, were not significantly associated with educational aspiration in a national study of American rural young people's educational aspirations (ibid., pp. 372-373), in contrast to Coleman's (1988) and Israel's (2001) earlier findings.

This study suggested that rural youth may experience unique forms of social capital such as long-standing and supportive student–teacher relationships and close community school relationships, compared to suburban and urban youth (Byun et al., 2012, p. 356). The depth of bonds with parents and the rural community that students grow up with, results in strong attachments to place and community. This can cause rural young people to adapt their educational aspirations to match locally available HE and work opportunities in order to stay, even when they are aware of the advantages of tertiary education.

Research in Australia on the effect of family and school/community social capital influences on young people's decision-making around PCE choices pathways in rural areas, found that some family networks were more inclined to focus on helping young people find work locally, rather than encouraging them to consider further education and training (Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 51). Turner's (2017) study of the role of family members on young people's decision-making about going to University in remote areas of Queensland, Australia, found that family social capital was pivotally influential (p. 97). Three significant aspects of this family influence emerged:

- Parents and older family members were often a source of inspiration to young people to go to University;
- Siblings provided realistic advice and information, particularly if they attended University themselves; and,
- Moving away and being away from home was a significant influencing factor for parents and young people which could have decisive effects, depending on prior and existing knowledge and experience of HE and 'other' places (ibid., p. 105).

In a UK study on the effects of rurality on young people's PCE choices in a remote ex-mining town, Mills and Gale (2008) described the 'inheritance' effect of family social capital. The history of low educational attainment, long-term unemployment and economic marginalisation that young people observed among their parents and community, led them to assume these were the only options available to them. Similar findings emerged in an Australian study of geographical and place dimensions of participation in PCE and work, where young people were significantly influenced by their educational and career 'inheritance' and expected to follow similar paths to their parents (Webb at al., 2015, p. 3). Living in isolated, rural communities, young people may have limited exposure to alternatives beyond the norms in their community or to new people, ideas and experiences which might disrupt 'strong ties' to the familiar and comfortable (Webb et al., 2015, p. 14). Limitations on the number of social networks available in rural areas with low populations may restrict the type and number of 'weak ties' and therefore availability of bridging and linking social capital.

Research in a remote and coastal location in Nova Scotia, Canada, found that young people who displayed academic potential were encouraged by educational professionals to leave (Corbett, 2000 cited in Webb et al., 2015, p. 35). The prevailing rural deficit discourse cast those young people who chose to stay as lacking in aspiration, ambition and/or ability. However, Corbett's subsequent research suggested a more nuanced picture in that males tended to have privileged access to status and higher paid jobs in the fishing community that did not require formal education to access them (Corbett, 2007, p. 438). Corbett also noted that young females in the community were more likely to acquire higher levels of education qualification than males but this did not lead to high income if they chose to stay because of the gendered structure of jobs in the local fishing industry. However, he argued that this did not necessarily mean they lacked aspiration, ambition or ability but rather that they did not wish to move away and that in fact they used the literacy and social skills resulting from their educational advantage to strengthen economic benefits to the family in other ways. For people in this coastal community, formal education was often viewed as something one needs to do if one wants to live somewhere else.

Similar discrepancies were found in rural and regional Australia where professionals viewed young people who remained in the area as those who 'can't handle living away from home, just can't, or couldn't cope'. This contrasted with young people themselves, who did not regard a choice to stay with the familiar and access benefits, such as a strong and supportive sense of solidarity and connectedness, as a deficit option (Webb et al., 2015, p. 35).

3.6 Fear of the unknown

Fear of the unknown emerges as a significant factor in some rural young people's decision-making about Higher Education (e.g. Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 54, Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016, p. 144). Whilst for some it was regarded as a life experience opportunity, for others it presented as an unpleasant and even threatening experience. In a national study of rural young people in Australia, some participants reported three aspects of moving away to study that contributed to their apprehension and fear – a dislike for the hectic lifestyle, anxiety at moving to an unknown environment, and a real fear for one's safety (Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 53). In one Canadian study of perceived barriers to HE participation for rural students, fear of the unknown was mentioned by nearly half of participants as a factor in their decision-making (Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016, p. 144). This included aspects such as size of the University, relocating to an unfamiliar city and safety concerns about being in a strange and urban environment. These types of concerns appear consistently in studies of rural HE participation where emotional issues are considered. For example, in a study of perceived barriers for young people living in rural and/or remote areas of Scotland, adult teachers and education professionals also identified fear of the unknown, size of universities and the intimidating nature of the big city (Lasselle, 2016, p. 84).

However, fear of the unknown could also relate to making the right decision, for example, choosing the "right degree" to avoid being "stuck," unable to change their course of action easily, and burdened with the cost (Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016, p. 144).

3.7 Distance

Research in Australia to explore the geographical and place-based dimensions of participation in education and work (Webb et al., 2015) found that young people in school Year 10 and above (Year 10 in Australia correlates to Year 11 in England) made decisions about their futures within the constraints of 'objective' local opportunity and 'subjective' perceptions of what might be available and appropriate. Young people in this study identified strongly with their neighbourhoods and talked about their career and education aspirations in connection with the place they lived. These 'embodied psychologies of place' referred to an area's natural geographic features and socio-geographic history and represented a protective and supportive resource for some young people (Webb et al., 2015, p. 33). However, they could also represent a physical and psychological boundary to outward mobility – 'an emotional sort of border' that governs young people's willingness to move to pursue career opportunities.

Thus, for many young people, career aspirations and choices were determined by the invisible radius of an hour - locations and opportunities within one hour's travel from home were considered relatively familiar and accessible, while locations beyond one hour's travel tended to be thought of as less familiar and less accessible for work and education opportunities. The effects of emotional distance on aspiration were compounded for young people from low income backgrounds who lived in areas with inadequate public transport and where reliance on access to a car for transport is necessary (ibid.).

4 Literature Review (2): Widening Participation in Cumbria

4.1 Boundaries of West Cumbria

West Cumbria is located on the North West coast of England, along the western coastal strip extending from Barrow-in-Furness in the south of the county, towards Carlisle in the north of the county, (Britain's Energy Coast: a masterplan for West Cumbria, 2007, p. 12). Whilst it includes part of the area covered by Copeland and Allerdale Borough Councils, it is generally accepted to mean the coastal area to the west of the Lake District National Park Authority boundary to the north and to the west of the A595 to the south (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and it is this meaning adopted by the present study.

4.2 Characteristics of rural and coastal West Cumbria

In a 2007 review of the West Cumbrian economy, Britain's Energy Coast Masterplan (2007) noted that the area had a £2.8 billion economy; a population of 167,000 people and 2.4% of the then total North West population of 7 million. It covers an area of 2,000 sq km, almost a third of the Cumbrian sub-region and 14% of the North West. West Cumbria is characterised by large, sparsely populated rural areas and small urban centres, with Whitehaven and Workington being the two largest towns. Part of West Cumbria is within the Lake District National Park (LDNP), which represents a physical barrier between West Cumbria and key markets in the North West and North East.

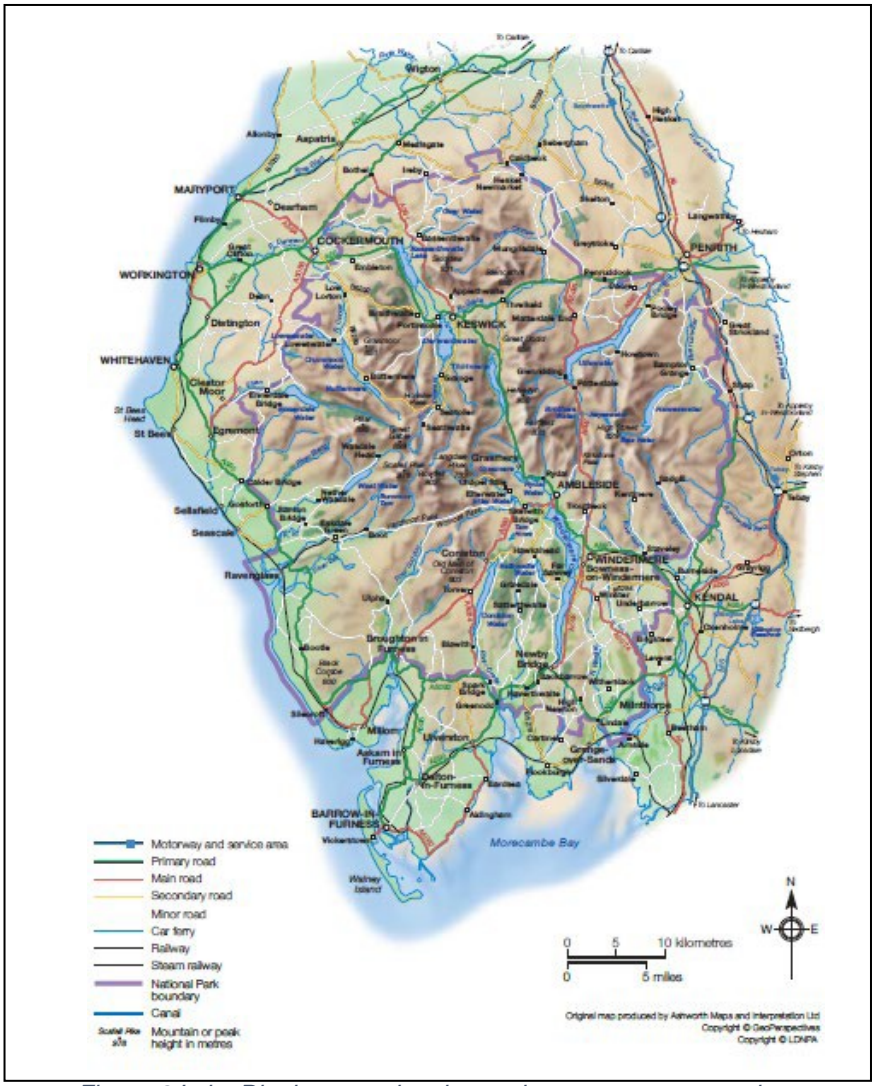

Figure 6 Lake District map showing major transport connections

4.3 Distance

West Cumbria is remote from large towns and cities and major transport infrastructure, being over 40 miles from the M6 motorway and West Coast Mainline rail links (Britain's Energy Coast: a masterplan for West Cumbria, 2007, p. 12). Carlisle (population 108,000) is the closest city to West Cumbria, located to the North East and connected by the A595. However, this is a 32 mile journey by car, taking 50 plus minutes from Workington and a 38 mile journey from Whitehaven, taking at least 1 hour 10 minutes. Barrow-in-Furness is geographically close to south Copeland, with the town of Millom only around 7 miles from Barrow 'as the crow flies', but over 25 miles by road. Thus, distance is a physical reality for young West Cumbrians, for example, even the nearest University (University of Cumbria) is over 30 miles away from Workington, a journey of 1 – 1.5 hours by car, train or bus. Table 3 illustrates distances and travel times between locations within the study area and Universities in major UK cities (Edinburgh and Glasgow have been included for comparison although 4 year courses at Scottish universities may present a deterrent for English students due to the additional funding requirements).

	Location in study area (maximum distance in miles by car, travelling fastest route)			
City/universities in UK	Workington	Distington	Aspatria	Silloth
Workington (Lakes College)	0	0.5	16	22
Penrith (Newton Rigg College)	40	36	29	33
Carlisle (University of Cumbria)	33	34	21	23
Newcastle (Newcastle & Northumbria Universities)	91	92	78	81
Middlesborough (Teeside University)	111	112	104	108
Lancaster (University of Cumbria campus & Lancaster University)	90	68	83	87
Preston (UCLan)	105	106	98	102
Manchester (Manchester; Manchester Metropolitan; UMIST; Bolton; Salford; Royal Northern College of Music)	138	140	131	135
Liverpool (Liverpool; Liverpool John Moores)	150	152	143	147
Edinburgh (Edinburgh; Edinburgh Napier; Heriot-Watt; Queen Margaret)	130	131	116	119
Glasgow (Glasgow; Strathclyde; Glasgow Caledonian; West of Scotland)	129	130	115	119

York **(York; York St John; Askham Bryan)**	146	148	139	143

Leeds (Leeds; Leeds Beckett; Leeds Art; Leeds Trinity; Leeds College of Music)	142	143	135	139
London	332	325	325	315

Table 3. Distances between locations in the study area and major UK universities and/or cities.

4.4 Travel

Travel to, from and within Cumbria can involve long distances and indirect routes. This has shaped the history, economy, population distribution, transport connections and provision of services and means that parts of Cumbria are significantly remote, with West Cumbria being classified as the most remote sub-region in England (Britain's Energy Coast: a masterplan for West Cumbria, 2007, pp. 12; 30). 70% of Cumbria's settlements have less than 200 residents and travel times to reach essential services (schools, doctors surgeries, hospitals, shops, social and leisure facilities) are significantly greater than average (Cumbria Community Fund, 2017, p. 20). Travel in Cumbria thus tends to be dominated by car journeys, as frequent and comprehensive bus services are not generally commercially viable outside the larger urban areas (Cumbria Vision, 2009, p. 20). Public transport in West Cumbria consists of privately operated bus services and a coastal train service. There are also community transport options run by Cumbria County Council, although there are some restrictions related to under-18s and type of journeys e.g. school or hospital transport.

Independent travelling to destinations without a car may require young people to get from home to a bus stop, change buses or catch a train and for onward travel outside Cumbria, get to the nearest mainline stations at Carlisle or Lancaster. Clearly, for young people living in rural areas of Cumbria, travelling around and outside Cumbria can take longer and cost more than for young people living in urban areas and is part of the context of living in a rural and coastal area.

Some young people living in West Cumbria are accustomed to travelling to school by bus via subsidised bus passes or contracted school buses. Catchment areas for schools in rural Cumbria (Annex 3) can cover large areas and young people at secondary school who live more than the three mile statutory walking distance[2] from their catchment (or nearest qualifying) school or who fall into the 'low income' category[3], are provided with free transport up to age 16. Post-16, young people are only provided with free school transport if they live over 3 miles from nearest catchment Sixth Form or college, and, are from 'low income'[4] families.

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[2] The statutory walking distance is 2 miles for children aged under eight and 3 miles for children aged eight or over. This is defined as the distance measured by the nearest available walking route. For a route to be available, it must be one which a child, accompanied by an adult, could be expected to walk with reasonable safety. (School Transport Policy 2018/19, Cumbria County Council). https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/schoolsandlearning/schooltransport.asp

[3] This is defined for under-16 year old children as those who are entitled to free school meals, or whose families are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit (School Transport Policy 2018/19, Cumbria County Council)

[4] Defined for post-16 young people as:
Parent/carer in receipt of one of:

- Income Support;
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance;
- An income-related employment and Support Allowance;
- Support under part V1 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- Child Tax Credit (provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual income that does not exceed £16,190 as assessed by HMRC;
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit;
- Universal Credit.

Post-16 Transport low income criteria, Cumbria County Council)

4.5 Aspirations of young people in rural Cumbria

Research with young people in Year 10 (ages 14-15) in three UK rural areas, including Cumbria, found that few participants had particularly low aspirations (Spielhofer et al., 2011, p. 26). In fact, the study found that most had realistic aspirations based on an understanding of their own abilities, characteristics, personal preferences and opportunities available in the local area. Furthermore, these aspirations were dynamic rather than static, continuously shaped and modified in response to new experiences, perceptions and information.

A subsequent study of aspirations in the UK rural, coastal and dispersed areas collected data from policy-makers, practitioners, and young people aged 10-14 and 17-18 years old, using case study areas in rural Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire and Kent) (IntoUniversity, 2015). It also included discussions with Year 11 pupils from Cumbrian schools attending a residential programme at the University of Cumbria's Carlisle campus. Of the 98 Year 5 and 6 (primary) and Year 7 and 8 (secondary) children participating in focus groups, around a quarter expressed a clear decision to go to University; a quarter had decided they would not go to University with the remaining half undecided (IntoUniversity, 2015, p. 40). This suggests that although aspirations may be dynamic (Spielhofer et al., 2011, p. 1), aspiration formation may start early.

4.6 Parental level of education

One defining characteristic of the West Cumbrian workforce is the low level of educational qualification, although again this varies according to location, which can be masked by the scale at which information is reported. For example, in Copeland, only 23 % of the working age population (16 to 64 year olds) are educated to degree level or above, significantly lower than both the UK (37%) and North West (33%) averages (Oxford Economics, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, 12 % of those aged between 16 and 64 in Copeland had no qualifications at all, significantly above the 9% UK average. In contrast, in Allerdale, where a significant proportion of workers in a dominant industry live, 33% of the 16-64 year old working population are educated to degree level and only 8% had no qualifications at all. However, as with household income, deprivation and other aspects of socio-economic for West Cumbria, these figures mask the picture at the micro scale. Thus, for the wards included in this study (Aspatria, Distington, Frizington, Silloth), the percentage of the workforce with no qualifications at all ranged from 31-33% (Table 2).

4.7 Socio-economic deprivation in West Cumbria

Many of the lowest rates of participation in Higher Education in England occur in rural, dispersed and coastal areas (IntoUniversity, 2013, p. 4). Some of these areas are also associated with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, although socio-economic profiles in rural areas can be complex. For example, in Cumbria the large (c. 10,000) relatively well-paid workforce employed by the dominant industry in the area, affluent middle-class retirees, second home-owners contrast markedly with neighbourhoods that are amongst the most deprived in England (**Error! Reference source not found.**). The close co-existence of pockets of severe but localised deprivation alongside areas of relative affluence essentially creates a two tier local economy in North West Cumbria (e.g Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, 2009). On average, one third of people in Cumbria live in postcodes classified as 'comfortable communities' whereas one third of Cumbrians live in postcodes classified as 'financially stretched'. However, on a local scale these figures can be much more severe and income levels can be "shockingly low", for example, one in eight Cumbrian households have an income of less than £10,000 per year (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2017, p. 7).

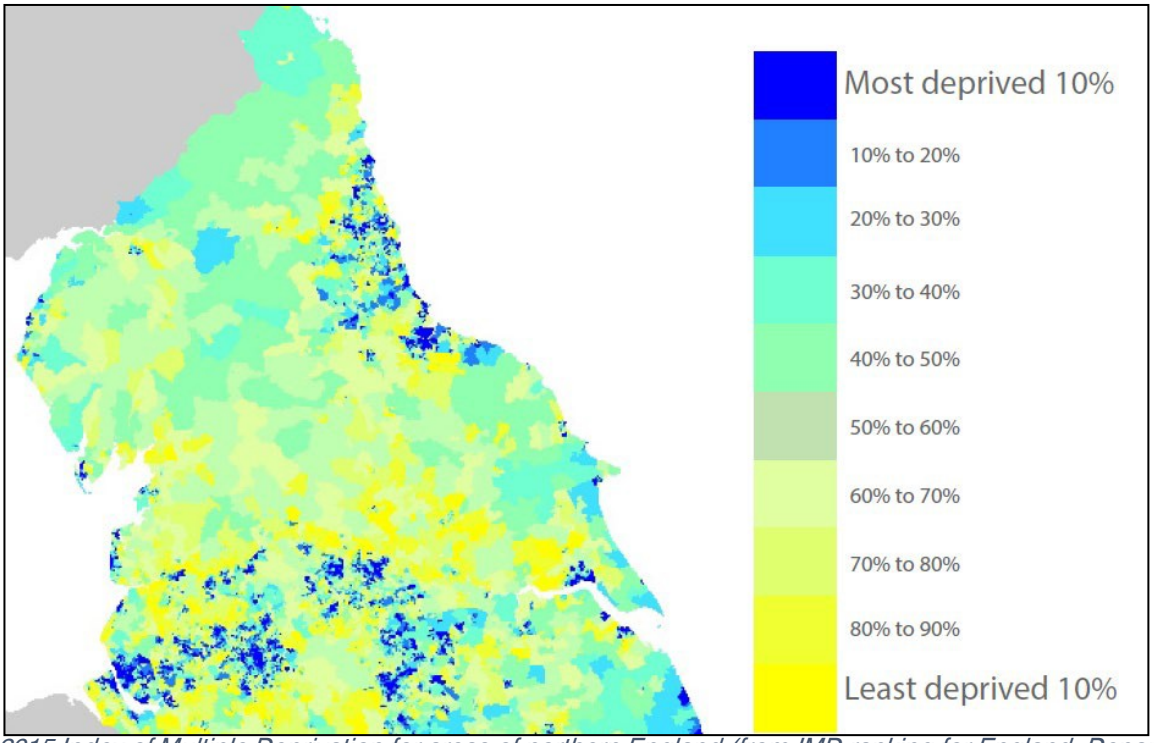

Figure 7 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation for areas of northern England (from IMD ranking for England, Department for Communities and Local Government)

The socio-economic profile for areas included in data collection for this study show how closely pockets of deprivation can co-exist with pockets of relative affluence. For example, in Frizington, Aspatria and Silloth, 50% of children under 16 years old were living in significantly income deprived households[5] (decile 2) with the other 50% living in relative affluence (decile 1 = most deprived and decile 10 = least deprived) (Table 4).

The data also shows that the percentage of people economically active in the wards that data collection is drawn from is considerably lower than the average for Cumbria and England. Furthermore, nearly a third of have no qualifications at all cf. to 7.6% for England.

[5] Income deprivation is defined as those that are in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit Guarantee

or Child Tax Credit below a given threshold, DCLG, 2015

Electoral ward name	Total population (2015)	% economically active	% No qualifications (ONS census 2011)	% households with no car (ONS census 2011)	% of area[6] in IDACI decile (DCLG 2015) (1 most deprived, 10 least deprived)
Distington	3,993	66.5	31.4	25.1	67% in decile 3; 33% in decile 7
Frizington	2,623	64.4	30.6	23.9	50% in decile 2; 50% in decile 7
Aspatria	3,429	68.8	30.7	19.4	50% in decile 3; 50% in decile 7
Silloth	3,297	62.9	32.9	18.3	50% in decile 3; 50% in decile 7
Cumbria	497,996	80.1	24.2	21.4	N/a
England		79.4	7.6		

Table 4. Socio-economic profile of wards included in this study

4.8 School ability to support HE aspirations

School characteristics and student performance data from example schools in and adjacent to, West Cumbria were extracted from government school performance data to provide a comparison of schools characteristics and educational attainment outcomes (Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.). Schools in West Cumbria that were not targeted for data collection are included for comparison purposes, although the data do not include all West Cumbrian schools. Schools in adjacent areas (Cockermouth and Keswick) were selected for comparison because they take out-of-catchment pupils from the target wards identified for this study.

Schools in West Cumbria have significantly higher percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) compared to the selected adjacent Cumbrian schools. Eligibility for free school meals is often used as a proxy for socioeconomic deprivation (although the reliability of this is widely contested, e.g. Taylor, 2017). They also have significantly higher percentages of eFSM than the national (England) average, although Energy Coast University Technical College (Energy Coast UTC) differs from the other West Cumbrian schools in that regard.

[6]Proportion of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in the (electoral) ward. LSOAs were aggregations of output areas (OA), created in 2004 and designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics. OAs are the smallest unit for which census data are released, first generated from 2001 census data, and contained at least 40 households and 100 persons with a target size being 125 households. OAs are aggregated from blocks of postcodes to create areas of similar population sizes and be as socially homogenous as possible based on tenure of household and dwelling type.

https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/censusgeography

Attainment at GCSE in English and Maths (a requirement for progression to subsequent academic studies) is somewhat lower in the selected West Cumbrian schools than adjacent Cumbrian schools, and lower than the national average.

The average grade and grade points achieved in West Cumbrian schools is lower than adjacent schools and the national average, together with the achievement of higher level grades in at least two facilitating subjects. A-level options available at schools in West Cumbria and adjacent areas were extracted from school websites and Sixth Form prospectuses to identify whether curriculum choices were constrained in rural West Cumbria (Table 6). Subject availability at all schools is conditional on student numbers selecting subjects and thus can vary from year to year at all schools. However, the data provided here provides a snapshot of subjects that schools provisionally offer at the time of writing (January 2019).

The data suggests that curriculum choices may be more limited in some rural West Cumbrian schools in the study area compared to larger, adjacent schools. However, all schools, except two (Netherhall School and Energy Coast UTC) offer the full range of Russell Group facilitating subjects (Russell Group, 2019).[7] Furthermore, some vocationally orientated subjects are available in West Cumbrian schools that are not available in adjacent schools e.g. Travel and Tourism.

[7] Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Maths and Further Maths; Geography; English Literature; History; Modern and classical languages.

	Selected schools in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards						Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas		Cumbria Local Authority state-funded schools /colleges	England state-funded schools /colleges
	Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Solway Community Technical College	Beacon Hill Community School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School		
Number of pupils on roll	258	830	1250	605	149 (no Sixth Form)	113 (no Sixth Form)	1334	1252		
No. of girls (%)	29.1%	48.2%	49%	48.4%	50.3%	38.9%	51.1%	51%		49.2%
No. of boys (%)	70.9%	51.8%	51%	51.6%	49.7%	61.1%	48.9%	49%		50.8%
Pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during past 6 years	22.5%	36.8%	16.3%	35.6%	42.3%	47.8%	13.4%	6.9%		29.1%
Grade 5 or above in 2017 English and Maths GCSE	24%	32%	56%	30%	34%	21%	54%	56%	42.8%	39.9%
A levels - average grade	E- (8)	C- (27.82)	C (28.73)	D+ (24.52)	N/a	N/a	C+ (32.61)	C+ (32.58)	C (30.19)	C+ (32.39)

	Selected schools in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards						Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas		Cumbria Local Authority state-funded schools /colleges	England state-funded schools /colleges
	Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Solway Community Technical College	Beacon Hill Community School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School		
(average points)										
Achieving AAB or higher in at least 2 facilitating subjects	Not entered	0%	12.4%	14.3%	N/a	N/a	21.2%	21%	13.5%	17%
Apprenticeship	81%	19% 9% +10% Gen 2 (Industry apprenticeship)	12%	31%			12%	7%	12%	7%
UK HEI	6%	56%	71%	45%	N/a	N/a	51%	65%	50%	51%
Top third of UK HEIs			30%	14%	N/a	N/a	18%	32%	18%	18%
Of which Russell group			23%	10%	N/a	N/a	14%	24%	14%	12%
Of which Oxford or Cambridge			Suppressed (<10 pupils)	Suppressed	N/a	N/a	Suppressed	3%	1%	1%
Other UK HEIs			41%	31%	N/a	N/a	33%	33%	31%	32%

	Selected schools in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards						Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas		Cumbria Local Authority state-funded schools /colleges	England state-funded schools /colleges
	Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Solway Community Technical College	Beacon Hill Community School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School		
FE	3%		Suppressed (<10 pupils)	24%			14%	6%	17%	13%
Employment	10%	17%	7%	21%			25%	21%	23%	23%
Not in education or employment		4%	5%	Suppressed			6%	6%	7%	8%
Gap year			5%	Suppressed	N/a	N/a	4%	8%	5%	3%

Table 5 School characteristics and student destinations for schools included in this study with comparison figures for schools not included but which accept applications from out-of-catchment pupils from Hello Future wards included in this study[8]

Selected schools* in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards (*Solway Community Technology School and Beacon Hill Community School do not have Sixth Forms and are therefore not included)				Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas	
Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School
	Art and Design	Art & Design	Art	Art, craft & desgn	Art, craft and design
Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology
	Business Studies	Business Studies	Business Studies	Business Studies	Business

[8] Extracted from www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk.Students finishing 16 to 18 study who either stayed in education or went into employment from October to March the following year. This data published for students who finished level 3 (A levels or other level 3 qualifications) 16 to 18 study in 2015, which is the most recent data currently available, and was published in January 2018)

Selected schools* in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards (*Solway Community Technology School and Beacon Hill Community School do not have Sixth Forms and are therefore not included)				Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas	
Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School
Chemistry	Chemistry	Chemistry	Chemistry	Chemistry	Chemistry
	Computer Science	Computer Science		Computer Science	Computer science
Construction					
				Drama & Theatre Studies	Performing arts
	Product Design	D&T: Product Design			Design & technology
					Design & technology: fashion and textiles
				Economics	
Engineering					
	English Language	English Language	English Language	English Language	English language
English Literature	English Literature	English Literature		English Literature	English literature
	French	French	French	French	French
	Further Mathematics	Further Mathematics	Further mathematics	Further mathematics	Further mathematics
					Government & Politics
	Geography	Geography	Geography	Geography	Geography
	German			German	German
	History	History	History	History	History
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
	Digital Media - Film & Video				Media studies
		Music		Music	RSL music practitioners
BTEC Sport	Sport	Physical Education	Sport and physical activity	Physical Education	Physical education
Physics	Physics	Physics	Physics	Physics	Physics
		Psychology		Psychology	Psychology
	Religious Studies	Religious Studies	Religious studies	Religious studies	Religion, philosophy and ethics
		Sociology			Sociology

Selected schools* in West Cumbria whose catchment area includes target Hello Future wards (*Solway Community Technology School and Beacon Hill Community School do not have Sixth Forms and are therefore not included)				Comparison schools in adjacent POLAR 5 areas	
Energy Coast UTC	Workington Academy	Nelson Thomlinson School	Netherhall School	Cockermouth School	Keswick School
		Spanish		Spanish	
Core Maths	Core Maths	Core Maths			Core maths
	Health & Social Care	Health and Social Care	Health and social care (single and double award)	Health and Social Care	
	Applied Science	Applied Science	Applied Science	Applied Science	
	Children's Play, Learning & Development				
	Information Technology		ICT		
Science core – Lab skills					
		Travel and Tourism			

Table 6. A level options available in selected West Cumbrian and adjacent school

4.9 Economy and job market of West Cumbria

The reasons behind the high levels of socio-economic deprivation in rural, dispersed and coastal areas are associated with the decline of traditional industries and economic activities (Cumbria Vision, 2009, p. 4). During the last fifty years, the local economy in West Cumbria has been characterised by an expanding dominant industry and declining coal, steel, shipping and chemical manufacturing. That primary industry is a significant player in its landscape and the primary site is expected to be operational into the future.

That industry is one of the largest employers in Cumbria, and is made up of one organisation with a directly employed workforce of 10,000 and a further 1000 agency supplied and contract workers. The industry also supports a significant supply chain and the industry is characterised by high salaries – higher than the UK average wage and dramatically higher than the median household incomes of the locality in which it is present. Furthermore, job security has traditionally been for life and pensions are generous (Grabrovaz, 2018, unpublished thesis), although the industry is understood to be in the process of reshaping its workforce.

As in other geographies, whilst employment in one dominant industry and its associated local supply chain can result in well-paid, secure jobs to many in the locality, its presence can create distortion and vulnerabilities in the local economy. Dependence on one industry, particularly in area where heavy industry, such as coal and steel, has declined, can results in lower levels of economic diversification and sharp demarcations between those who work in that industry and those who do not. For example, Workington became an unemployment blackspot following the cessation of coal mining in the 1980s and closure of the Moss Bay Steelworks in 1982, despite its relative proximity to the dominant employer.

The employment structure of Cumbria is already somewhat different from that of the region and England, due to a greater reliance on agriculture, hospitality and manufacturing and low representation of finance, business services and education (Cumbria Vision, 2009, p. 9). In West Cumbria, the major employers are the one dominant industry and the NHS.

The Lake District is a major UK and international tourist destination with 47 million visitors to the region in 2017, contributing £2.9 billion to the Cumbrian economy and supporting some 65,000 jobs, including part-time and seasonal (Cumbria Tourism, 2019).

However, tourism related jobs are often low-skill, low paid, part-time, seasonal and without a requirement for an HE pathway. Furthermore, the majority of tourism activity and jobs tends to be located away from the West Cumbrian coast e.g. Allerdale Borough Council Tourism Strategy 2002-2015 (p. 6) notes that visitor numbers in Tourist Information Centres in Maryport, Silloth and Workington in 2003 ranged from 13,000-20,000, cf. to 400,000 in Keswick and much larger visitor numbers within the Lake District National Park Authority and South Lakeland District Council.

5 Qualitative Data Findings

5.1 Overview

The literature reviews in chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate that, for any individual young person, it is how different dimensions of context intersect and interact that affects their decision-making around choices after the end of PCE. Friesen and Purc-Stephenson categorised the personal, social and cultural barriers to accessing HE encountered by young people aged 18-23 years in rural Alberta, Canada, who had not

attended University, into four themes: accessibility; psychological; family and social; and socio-cultural (Table 7).

Accessibility factors	1. Admission requirements – whether or not individuals would be able to meet the admission requirements for the course they wanted
	2. Distance – between home and nearest University and whether that was perceived as a temporary or permanent move
	3. Cost – the combination of tuition fees and higher living costs associated with moving away and living away from home. Also, and particularly for males, the short-term financial benefits, lack of debt and satisfaction of meeting immediate desires, associated with earnings from a job compared to long-term uncertain benefits of a degree, together with accruing significant debt
Psychological factors	4. Fear of the unknown – what is it like at a University, the size of a University, relocating somewhere unfamiliar, safety concerns, choosing the 'right' degree
	5. Maintaining a rural identity – fear of becoming a different person and how going to University might change people's lives, loss of 'better' and distinctive rural identity and values
Family and social factors	6. Parental education – sets the motivation and expectations for educational attainment
	7. Relationships – isolation from family and friends
	8. Responsibilities – caring responsibilities
Socio-cultural factors	9. Traditional values and beliefs – risks of questioning and rejecting community values and beliefs as a result of HE, together with greater respect and reputation from the community associated with 'real-world working' rather than HE
	10. Gendered expectations of the community – role of women vs. men
	11. Maintaining social norms –pressure from the community to maintain the status quo, resist change and add value to the community in the short-term rather than to individuals in the long-term
	12. Secondary school preparation – inadequate or inappropriate support and IAG from schools

Table 7. Factors influencing young people's decision-making around accessing HE (from Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016).

In turn, these factors have been used to inform a conceptual model to show how these factors interacted during the decision-making process young people went through when thinking about accessing HE:

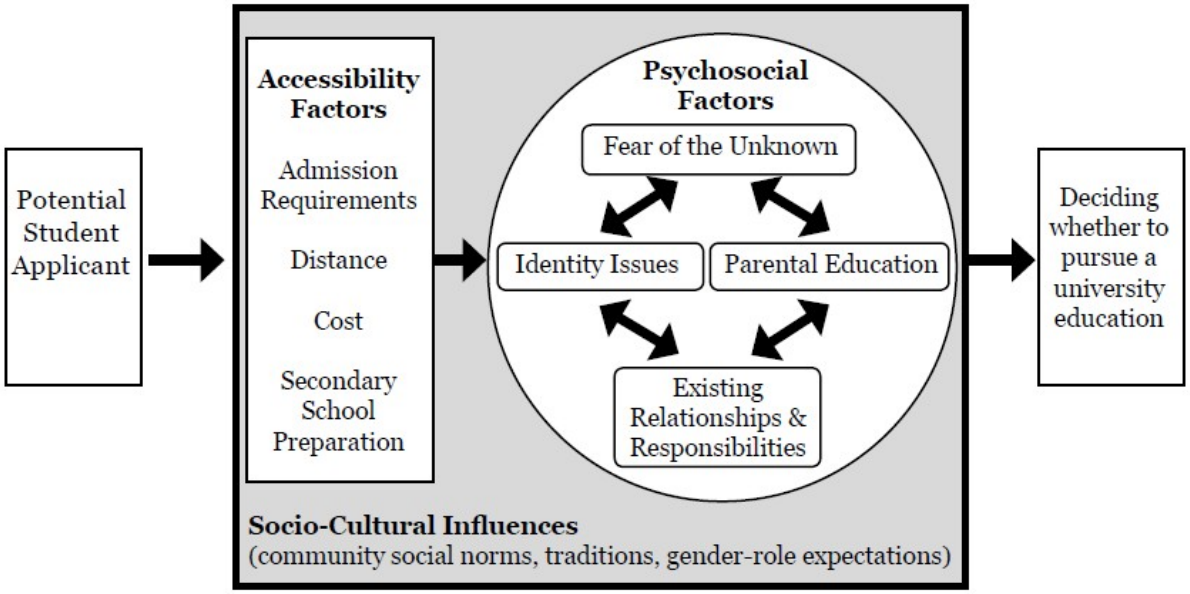

Figure 8. Conceptual model showing interacting personal, social and cultural factors influencing rural young people's' decision-making about accessing HE (from Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016, p.149).

The findings from the qualitative data collected for this project reflected a number of these different intersecting aspects of a 'rural context'. As such, this conceptual model can be used as a framework to explore the dimensions of context which participants raised as specific to the West Cumbrian area.

Using this model, and the literature collated in the reviews, the findings from data collection conducted between November 2018 and January 2019 have been categorised into themes as follows:

Theme	Dimensions of West Cumbrian WP context
Moving away	Distance
	Fear of the unknown
	Constant close contact with family
	Gender and identity issues in rural areas
	Timescale of 'moving away'
Variability in local environments and infrastructure	Transport and travel
	Local job traditions, community attitudes to HE, apprenticeships or jobs and the effect of a single dominant industry/employer
Socio-cultural factors	Parents experience of/attitude to education and HE

	Sources and availability of knowledge about HE and other options after the end of PCE

In the following chapter, each theme will be detailed in line with the data gathered through focus groups and interviews.

5.2 Moving away

'Moving away' emerged as a significant factor in decision-making about HE in all focus groups. Thus, the first response for participants in all three focus groups on being asked to think about how living 'here' affected how young people think about going to University, related to 'moving away' or 'missing family':

> *"I think if you live in the city, to go onto University isn't that big of a step. But because most of them are quite far away and because big cities are a lot different. So, for someone in the country it's a lot more daunting completely moving away than it would be if you lived in a city."*

> *"I think because it's such a small place where we are, everyone is just a little way away from you, a five-minute drive if that. I think you can get there so easily and it's so easy to contact them if you miss them. Say if I went to Liverpool University, I couldn't just nip and see my mam or my brother. It would be hard, I don't think I could do it."*

> *"I think apprenticeship degrees are the way forward around here because it's literally right on your doorstep, and you're in the industry for it as well. You'll more than likely stay on when you've got your degree. And if you are going to uni, I think you just look at it as having to move away."*

These responses captured four key elements of what 'moving away' involves - distance, difference, missing family and timescale of potential absence. The effect of each of these elements is discussed below.

5.2.1 Distance

Distance clearly played a significant role in some young people's decision-making, although the role and significance of distance was experienced differently by participants. Some participants felt that whether a University was near or far was irrelevant in the decision-making process:

> *"Once you're there, you stay there, really. Either way, it's going to be quite far away, so I don't think it matters".*

However, for others choosing a closer University was clearly an important part of the decision-making process:

> *"I think quite a lot of people in our year want to go -- they're wanting to go, they had ideas of going to -- is it Edge Hill? They wanted to go there, but now they've thought about it, they just want to go to Carlisle because it's convenient and nearby and it's just like -- their friends are there as well".*

"I think you get the same opportunity, it's the same course, you get the same qualifications at the end of it. So, it's easier for us to go to Carlisle, because we can still see our family all the time. Because you can literally just get a train there and a train back".

One outreach practitioner noted that choosing closer Universities was a distinct feature of West Cumbrian schools compared to other Cumbrian schools in areas of higher HE participation:

"I remember chunks of people from my school going to the same University. Northumbria, hugely popular. UCLAN in Preston. Because they are so easily accessible. You can be back in an hour and a half. The amount of people going further afield was much less. From [school name], my secondary school, I think the furthest someone went was Manchester….and that's drastically different, because then when I moved to [school name] for Sixth Form, people spread everywhere. Loads of people to London, Oxford, Cambridge".

Some participants felt that they would choose or change degree subjects that enabled them to stay closer to home:

"I know a lot of people who did that [change their subject choice to stay closer to home]. Even a case of going to the University of Cumbria, but if their degree was at the Lancaster Campus, they would swap it to study something that could be done in Carlisle".

However, others were clear that they or people they knew would choose the best University for the subject/course they wanted to do, somewhat irrespective of distance:

"If I was wanting to go to uni, I would want to go the uni that was the better uni. I wouldn't think "It's so far away, I'm not going because of that reason". I would want to go because I know I'd get something good out of it. But at the same time, I would want to be relatively close to home as well."

"My sister's going to University and she plans on going down south because they've got more courses, you've got more opportunities. It's just to get more from her education, I think."

"Every one of my friends that have gone to uni, they are nowhere near us. They're either in Durham or Liverpool. They are all nowhere near and a lot of them are planning on staying down there when they finish University as well."

"Everybody has their own opinion about what they want to do with their life. For me, personally, it wouldn't make a difference. But I know from quite a few people that I know that the idea of going anywhere south of Liverpool is terrifying."

In summary, distance is a major decision-making factor for West Cumbrian young people, in deciding what to do after their schooling finishes. In this context, distance has two main impacts: whether or not they will move away, and how far they are prepared to go

5.2.2 Fear of the unknown

The second element of 'moving away' is a fear of the unknown which can include physical and visual differences between 'here' (i.e. West Cumbria) and 'away', being surrounded by strangers rather than people you know and recognise

> *"… just the fact that it's quite a dramatic change. It's just the complete opposite of here".*

This includes aspects such as density and height of buildings, numbers of people, multi-culturalism, being surrounded by people that you do not know rather than usually knowing or recognising the people around you, names, accents, complexity of urban environments.
However, it was not just that urban environments are so physically and visually different to West Cumbria but also that being so far away from them meant that young West Cumbrians may not experience travelling to, and being in, different environments as frequently. For example, one focus group participant summarised how she perceived West Cumbria as being different to other parts of the UK as:

> *"I think if you live in a different part of the UK, you'll get to see more different cultures and more religions, and you'll get to experience more. Whereas everything like here goes one way".*

For some young people, this means they do not develop confidence in their capacity to cope with change and deal with novel situations on a sustained basis. Travelling and being in a strange urban environment as a one-off or occasional activity, in the company of family or close friends, is a very different experience to setting off alone, for extended visits away, relying on your own confidence and experience in problem solving.

One outreach practitioner working with young West Cumbrians noted that there is considerable variability in their experience of traveling and being outside West Cumbria:

> *"It's so varied, it depends on family, mainly. There will be a lot of young people who will regularly go to Manchester, Newcastle, London and other big cities to concerts and events and things that are going on. Equally, there are a lot of students who will never, ever have left their town. I work with a lot of students for whom going to Workington to the shops is an excursion. It's hugely varied, I think".*

Another key aspect in envisaging being able to cope with moving away to a different environment is that many young West Cumbrians have limited experience of independent travelling. For some, lack of travel may be associated with high levels of deprivation combined with poor access to public transport around Cumbria. But even for families that own cars or use trains to travel to other places in the UK, for example, for shopping, visiting relatives, concerts and theatres, these trips are organised and managed by parents or friends, rather than the young people themselves. Whilst focus groups participants all reported that they had travelled quite extensively to other parts of the UK, for example, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, they also agreed that these journeys were usually organised by family or other adults (for example, friends' parents). Further discussion about the details of managing travelling by yourself suggested some had little confidence in their ability to travel independently. One participant, who answered confidently that if she wanted to travel to Newcastle for a concert by herself that it would be quite easy to just catch a train from her local town, was less sure about managing at the other end:

> *"To get back from Newcastle is not that bad. I just get the train from Aspatria and then change at Carlisle, it's quite easy. But because I've never lived in a city, when I got there, I think I would be quite confused about how I would get from the train station to the concert."*

Her perception of travelling to Newcastle and back for a concert as being easy also perhaps reveals a lack of experience in actually doing that independently. Whilst the journey from Aspatria is relatively simple (train to Carlisle and change there for train to Newcastle with a duration between 2-3.5 hours), the last train

back from Newcastle is at 21:23, thus evening concerts and performances are likely to involve staying overnight.

For some young West Cumbrians however, finding their way about in a new place was enjoyable:

> *"Part of me enjoys trying to find my way around, and if you do get lost you can pull out your phone and have a look on that."*

As young people get older, opportunities to experience independent travel increase, however, by that time many of them will have already made the decision(s) about progress from post-compulsory education:

> *"Since I've been 18, I've already been out of the country on my own, for example. It just opens up a lot more -- that's the problem, is that even just doing that, it still cost me a lot to do that because you're miles away from everywhere."*

Outreach practitioners, who worked with young people from West Cumbria and other areas as part of the National Citizenship Scheme, also noted that many young people are driven almost door-to-door by parents or adults most of the time:

> *"I think a lot of young people are very used to parents driving them everywhere. Therefore, the thought of not having that is quite -- that sort of scares people a bit. You hear of parents who take their children to school everyday that would only be a ten-minute bus ride. That breeds a certain feeling about travel. Again, if you've grown up with it and it's natural to you, it's an easy step to make, whereas if you haven't… When I did some research with some NCS groups, year 11 students, things kept cropping up like, how do you know when the buses go? And how do you get a ticket? It's really easy for adults in this area to sneer at that, but actually…Will they take a card, do you know when to get off, how do you know where your stop is? All of these things that's fine, yes, if you've grown up doing it it's easy, but I think […] a lot of adults […] assume that's not a barrier when it is."*

Multiple experiences of independent travel may be so lacking for some young people that it is a real barrier to thinking about going away to University on your own:

> *"Whereas if you travel to cities, and even things like multiculturalism, having the experience of what things are like in a bigger place, will impact where you see yourself going".*

An outreach practitioner who grew up in a location in the study area herself and now works with young people in West Cumbria noted that:

> *"If you had a student from a Manchester NCOP[1] ward who went to an Open Day in somewhere like Sheffield, things are obviously not the same, but things aren't going to look as drastically different as they do if you come from here. Where you know every single person in your town, never mind just your street. Then you go to somewhere even in an NCOP ward in Manchester, you have diversity, multiculturalism. It's a city."*

One participant described the effect being somewhere different had on her decision-making about going to University, which influenced significantly her choice of where she would be prepared to go:

> *"I remember I only had one interview for University. I remember going down and even just that environment and hearing everybody's names called out and thinking, "These aren't names like my name." Even very little things like that. Hearing accents and hearing all of*

[1] National Collaborative Outreach Programme, the previous name for the Uni Connect programme.

that sort of thing was huge. I didn't go to that University because the experience threw me so much."

For some young West Cumbrians, going off by themselves somewhere unfamiliar to do something new induces quite strongly negative feelings:

"Just a sort of inadequacy, first of all. And an alienation, a feeling of I don't belong here, as opposed to, I belong in my community, where everything is what I know."

"the idea that moving to a new place can be scary as well. You don't know where you are, it's new to you, you're going to have to work out all these different things that are going to be really odd to you. You're not going to be able to really -- some people might be prepared to do it on their own, some people might wait until later on in their life to move away."

In summary then, the focus groups raised themes around the perception of places away from Cumbria as 'other'. Even if they do visit 'other' places with family and friends for concerts or to visit relatives, some participants suggested that these forays away from home may not provide experiences which facilitate the imagining of themselves going off to study or live in 'other' places and this can strongly influence their decision-making about post-compulsory progression.

5.2.3 Constant close contact with family

The third element of 'moving away' related to a perceived loss of constant contact with people (notably family) which came up in all focus groups:

"I think because it's such a small place where we are, everyone is just a little way away from you, a five-minute drive if that. I think you can get there so easily and it's so easy to contact them if you miss them. Say if I went to Liverpool University, I couldn't just nip and see my mam or my brother. It would be hard, I don't think I could do it."

"The reason that I want to stay is because I've got younger siblings. I wouldn't want to leave and miss out on them. I do want to stay around my family as well. I just think for what career I want to have, around here is the better place to be. But it's more of a family thing, I think."

"I think it's got a lot to do with family as well. I don't think it's anything to do with the jobs around here or what is around here. I think it is based mostly to do with family. People want to stay around here for family. I don't think there is a lot for people around here, really."

"I also think with a lot of people, I mean, most of my family have stayed around here. A lot of them have had the opportunity to go everywhere. My mum had the opportunity to go to Switzerland, but she didn't want to because her family were here. That's the big incentive why people want to stay around here more than anything. Because they know it. Moving, it's a big thing really, isn't it? You have to restart your life."

This was important to many of the participants in the study but not all:

"Some people I know can't wait to move away, but other people are really close with their family and they couldn't do that."

One male student was keen to move away, even though his mother had previously turned down a work opportunity to move abroad because she wanted to stay near her family:

"I personally want to move away. Ever since I've had my first holiday, I've just wanted to go somewhere else and see what it's like. I've never really wanted to settle down in the same place… It's not that I've got anything against my family, of course, but I'm just a lot more adventurous, so to say, than most of my family. I mean, my family are happy to go to the same place and do nothing but sit there for two weeks, whereas I definitely want to go and look around and see what there is to do."

One outreach practitioner summarised her experience of working with young people in the area as being strongly dichotomous; young people felt strongly that either they wanted to move away or they wanted to stay:

"Almost always, there is a really clear split. It's one camp firmly or the other camp firmly. I don't meet many students who are like, maybe I'd move away. I meet students who either can't wait to leave or students who are like, absolutely not. That's what this sort of tight-knit community does to people. It makes them feel like, I hate this and want to be far away and experience all these other things, or it makes people think, I love where I'm from, I'm really proud of where I'm from, I feel like I'm part of something really wonderful and I want to stay here."

Being closely embedded in family and community networks can be a powerful factor in young people's decision-making processes about going to University. For some young West Cumbrians' in this study, being part pf a close-knit community was one of the key 'good' aspects of living here:

"It's like a community. It's a very close community as well. Everyone knows everyone."

On being asked what it is about living in rural and coastal West Cumbria that is important to people when they are thinking about going on to University, leaving family was the most important aspect for some participants:

"I think it's because I don't like leaving my family. I'm a homebody. I don't think I could leave my mam and my dad."

"I think because it's such a close community, people are scared to move away."

The majority of participants had lived here all their lives and knew most people in their surrounding communities, which was clearly reassuring to some young West Cumbrians, although to others it felt quite closed off:

"I think we're like, quite closed off from -- I don't know, because we're such a close community, we're quite closed off from everything else."

One consequence of being able to maintain close contact with family, knowing and recognising the people around you, doing things with a constant group of friends, is that young people may only feel confident in that relatively constant and familiar context and have little experience of doing new things in new places, by themselves. This can affect their decision-making about whether to go to University at all:

"I don't genuinely think I could go and meet new people and be confident in where I am, not knowing anybody, and leave everything I've ever known behind. Even if it's just for a few years, I don't think I could do it."

It can also affect their decision-making about where to go to University:

"My cousin has had to go to Carlisle University, because her sister has just had kids, so she doesn't want to miss them growing up. She was really excited to go to Manchester University, but she had to go to Carlisle because she didn't want to miss them growing up… she still did the same course, but she just changed Uni."

Experience of diversity, complexity and fast-paced or dynamic change can be quite limited in such a constant environment leading to anxiety and fear when thinking about moving away to a 'different' environment. One participant felt she would not be able to or want to move away because of having to leave her family, despite the fact that she had experienced a successful outcome associated with major change when her high school merged with another:

"I was obviously scared to come here [current school] because the schools merged, so now I'm here I love it. So, I'm sure if I went to University, I would love it after a few months. I think it's the initial thought of just going and leaving my family and not being able to see them every day."

For this young person, despite this successful experience, she still could not contemplate putting herself in a situation in future of being surrounded by strangers:

" I think if I went to University, I would just feel anxious. Say I was in a class and I didn't know anybody, I wouldn't want to contribute to the class. I wouldn't feel confident to be sat there. I am here, because I've grown up with the people. But I wouldn't be if I didn't know anybody."

In summary then, for some West Cumbrian young people, constant close contact with family is such a fundamental part of their identity that being on your own, doing new things and being surrounded by people you do not know well is an alarming prospect and they are willing to adapt their aspirations to avoid it.

5.2.4 Gender and identity issues in rural areas

Gender was another significant influence on decision-making about progressing to higher education for many participants.

One outreach practitioner summarised her experience of how gender affects males:

" I think it's harder for boys to aspire to University because a lot of the industry here is gendered… farming, [the dominant industry]. I think despite the fact there's a lot of girls who aim for [the dominant industry], I think it still holds the gendered… I think as well, apprenticeships are quite gendered in terms of plumbing, electrician, engineering, construction and building. Despite the fact I meet a lot of girls who are going for those careers, I do still think that attitude persists. It almost feels like University is -- it's an attitude of, why would you do that when we've got all these things that exist here for you? A lot of it is to do with masculinity, and why do you want to go and study and sit in a library for three years, when you could be out on a job."

"I think with males it's about the job, the industry and attitudes to school. I think a lot of people view University as a continuation of school. Then if you hate school, why would you do that?"

However, in her experience girls were also be more likely to want to stay in the area because of social and community links:

"Often, the girls are the ones who would want to keep those family and friend connections, more so than boys do. It's more important for girls to stay … to stay close to family."

Apprenticeships can offer a genuine alternative to HE which appear to provide a good fit with male rural identity. Apprenticeships are perceived to avoid the uncertainty, costs and debt of HE, are locally well-regarded, providing pay and experience with a clear pathway to a well-paid, secure local job as this male student explained:

"One of the things people look at as well, is money and stuff like that. Degree apprenticeships allow you to learn but also, they allow you to get paid whilst learning, whilst in the industry. So, it's a better alternative to University. If you want to go to University, go to University but the apprenticeships are always there as an alternative, as opposed to just having one option and that's it, go and do that".

One outreach practitioner reported that she frequently encountered students who were capable of achieving As and A* at A level but would preferentially accept a level 2 apprenticeship if their applications were accepted because that meant they had secured their apprenticeship future.

One female participant explained how she used to think that degree level education was important but knew of people that ended up in the same place whether or not they pursued a degree level or level 2 apprenticeship:

"I used to think it was and I've always wanted to do a degree apprenticeship, which is what I've applied for leaving school. But I know people that left after GCSEs and are going to end up in the same position as I get on to after a degree. So, I don't think it's vital."

Another female student who was interested in child psychology but was very clear she would be unable to leave her family to go away and study at University, was quite pragmatic about alternatives routes to access her subject interests:

"Yes, because we could just finish at University and become a teaching assistant or just something simple like that, but I don't know about you, but I want to do Child Psychology, but the Police can offer that as well."

For some young females in West Cumbria, it does seem that they feel there are fewer opportunities to realise their job aspirations locally which makes them more likely to think about going to University:

"I think for boys there's a lot more opportunity when it comes to things like plumbing and stuff like that, at the college. If you are a girl around here, there's either the hospitals to go and work in, or just do like hairdressing or something. I think more girls would think about going to University."

However, social factors can act as a deterrent for some girls as they may be more aware of and concerned about potential social issues associated with going away to University on their own, as explained by this outreach practitioner:

"I think for girls, it's more about the place, the people, the family and the confidence. Girls worry about making friends, fitting in, all of the social side of things as well."

Different experiences and perceptions of the effects of gender emerged in a discussion in the one mixed gender focus group. Participants were asked whether they thought there were differences between being male and female in a rural area that affected people's decision-making about progression from PCE. Some of the males felt there were no differences:

"No, not here. Maybe in the city but not here."

Indeed, for another male student there was almost a sense that gender bias problems must have been solved because advertising and marketing around engineering included images of both males and females nowadays:

"I know the advertising in it now as well, has a lot of female and male, whereas five or six years ago it would have had just predominantly male in certain aspects. But now it's more tailored towards most genders, so it's not really so big of a problem now as it was maybe five, six, seven years ago."

However, females in the group reported different experiences and perceptions:

"…a lot of the more hands-on jobs are normally associated with men rather than women … I think it's the same with the hospital as well. It's more like the men should work at [dominant industry] and the women should work at the hospital."

Another female participant acknowledged that there had been an historical gender bias in the power and engineering industries and that although the numbers of males to females in her classes and work-based training was still unequal, she did not perceive differences in either their work or opportunities:

"Yes, I don't think it's a big issue now, because I know there's a lot of things in power and in engineering, I think they are realising that was a big problem. So, I wouldn't be put be off applying for like, hands on jobs. I think I would have an equal chance as a boy would do … In my engineering class over at Gen 2, I'm the only girl and there's four boys. I don't see any difference in our work or anything. It's just, I think, around here, whoever is better suited for the job will get the job."

However, thinking about the West Cumbrian context outside of engineering, the girls acknowledged that jobs could still be gendered in many ways and, whilst they did not feel constrained by gender, other people might, as this exchange between three female students shows:

"It depends, because I think a lot of shops that you could go to work in in town are very limited. For example, New Look. There's not a man that works in there."

"For women, I think -- well men are like, "I don't want to work in a women's clothes shop", but then it's like you were saying -- at this school there are a lot more boys than there are girls. It isn't equal. But I think that's because people still assume girls and boys to be like one for something and one for something else."

"A lot of people who didn't want to come here when I joined, were girls who were saying, "I don't want to be an engineer." But it's not just about that. So I think it's just people's views.

Some people think, no, I don't want to do that because I'll look such and such, but if it's a job it's a job, isn't it?"

One outreach practitioner reflected on the gendered nature of degrees that Cumbrian students aspire to, linking this to the importance of clear career pathways to West Cumbrian students:

"There's also something to be said about the types of degrees that Cumbrian students aspire to. There's a lot in terms of nursing and teaching, real vocational professions. I think it's really important for West Cumbrian kids to see a career at the end of a degree. Quite often those careers are feminine. Things like nursing, midwifery."

This was a view reflected by focus group participants as this exchange between the interviewer and a female student shows:

INTERVIEWER: "Do you think that going to University is important to people that you know?"

FEMALE STUDENT: "I think it depends on what job they are wanting to do".

INTERVIEWER: "So University is connected to job?"

FEMALE STUDENT: "Yes"

For some participants, choosing to go away for University seemed to be associated with a risk that people would be changed by the experience and that this would predispose them to being able to stay away:

"Plus, there is also to mention that if people do move away, they will probably get used to being around there and they'll get used to that sort of flow and that way of life. They might like it, they might not but if they do, there's a good chance they'll stay up there."

"With our course, if we wanted to go to University, you would have to go on a placement to do some of the stuff. You might get a job with it and you might not want to come back."

In summary, gender can be an important influence on young people's decision-making about progression after the end of PCE. For male participants, the prevalence of apprenticeships available offer a real alternative to HE that fits in with male rural identities. Females can, and do, also pursue the apprenticeship route but numbers are still not proportional to the local population gender balance. Outside of engineering, the dominant employer and its supply chain apprenticeship pathways, female participants perceived that they have fewer opportunities to realise their aspirations and may thus be more likely than boys to progress to HE. While the focus groups were aimed to capture the diversity of viewpoints, rather than positing a representative data collection, it is of note that the subject choices reflect the gendered structure of the local job market.

5.2.5 Timescale of 'moving away'

Another important dimension of 'moving away' was whether or not young people viewed this as short-term and temporary or long-term and permanent. For some, going away to University represented the start of moving away permanently:

"I think when you live around here, you've got to think of it as like moving fully away, because when you go and get a degree and then come back, there's nothing really for you around here to get a job in."

"I think they see it as long term, because some people, some courses that they do, I don't think would be very useful around here. For what job opportunities there are available."

However, for others going away to University could just be a temporary move:

> *"I think it's more just a few years. I know me and my friends all want to go to University, but I'm sure some of them will want to come back."*

For some young people, local degree apprenticeships offered a way to resolve the tension between having to go away to pursue HE aspirations but wanting to stay in the local area:

> *"I think apprenticeship degrees are the way forward around here because it's literally right on your doorstep, and you're in the industry for it as well. You'll more than likely stay on when you've got your degree. And if you are going to uni I think you just look at it as having to move away."*

One outreach practitioner working with young West Cumbrians noted that for many of them, going to University is perceived as moving away forever, despite the fact that students can come back to visit, during holidays and after graduating:

> *"There's also a real feeling that if you move it's forever… One of the things I quite often say is, I moved away for four years and during that four years, every few months -- I was only a few hours away, I could come down for a weekend and I stayed in touch with all my friends from school and I didn't miss any of my friends 21sts and all these things. I work quite hard to paint it as a picture of something that can be temporary if you want it to be. But I think people see it as leaving here and not returning."*

Clearly then, for young West Cumbrians, one of the most significant choices they need to make in considering their options after the end of compulsory education, is whether to stay or whether they will be able to leave.

5.3 Variability of localised environments within West Cumbria

Another significant dimension of the West Cumbrian context that emerged from the data was how much local environments could differ from each other, as well as from other parts of the UK. An outreach practitioner who worked with young people in West Cumbria described how she felt her job differed from the same job being performed by colleagues in other parts of Cumbria:

> *"So, I work in ten schools and colleges across West Cumbria … I often say in terms of our work … it's different for West Cumbria. There are people who do my exact job in two other areas in Barrow, and in Carlisle. I think we have very different roles because of the nature of West Cumbria. My ten schools and colleges are miles apart. Even within those ten, the differences are staggering... there are places that are geographically isolated in terms of public transport and just getting there. Places like Silloth. Then some of the wards, although they are rural, they are more sort of urban, town-based almost, or on the outskirts of towns."*

> *"So already, the dynamics of West Cumbria are just completely different to somewhere like Carlisle where everything is within that city and is urban, and Barrow, where although it's geographically isolated, everything is still in that one place."*

This captures a number of the elements that make up this variability within West Cumbria – distance, isolation due to lack of public transport, proximity to the dominant employer, rural or town based. The specific combination of these elements in any location can combine to create a very different context for young people living in that location and against which they are making decisions about whether to stay or leave, pursue HE or not.

5.3.1 Transport and travel

Access to transport and ease of travel can vary significantly in locations just a few miles apart. In one focus group, participants lived in various small settlements near to a large town with train and bus connections. Two of the participants lived in a settlement four miles away from this large town, with access to a reasonably regular bus service. Even so, they mostly relied on lifts from mothers, for example, to school or into 'town' for shopping and leisure, although they could, and did, sometimes catch the bus, for example, to attend a placement in a nursery school in the large town.

> *"Well, we live in [settlement name] and it's quite hard. We've got to go between -- there's three of us - and we've got to go between our mams to give us a lift, because we're not allowed to get the bus to school, we're not allowed to get the school bus. It's a bit complicated getting the bus to the bus station and walking up. So, it's just easier getting a lift."*

Another participant lived in a smaller settlement, only two miles away further away (and five miles from the large town) but with no access to any form of public transport, was completely reliant on being driven everywhere by parents.

Distances do not have to be great to be a significant dimension of the West Cumbrian context. Travelling relatively short distances in Cumbria can be as difficult as travelling long distances, depending on exactly where in West Cumbria young people live. For example, one outreach practitioner pointed out the impossibility of travelling to and from one particularly inaccessible small town for her work, using public transport:

> *"I didn't drive until this year and [School Name] in [Small Town Name], I physically couldn't get there. There was no way. It wasn't a money thing, work would have covered my transport costs, but there physically was not a way for me to get there… There were three buses a day. I could have got there for a one-hour gap to deliver something… So, I couldn't do my job. It's that level of inaccessibility."*

Indeed, she also reported that a local FE/HE college serving West Cumbria had stopped trying to recruit students from [Town Name] due to transport difficulties:

> *"If you live in [Big Town Name], you're on a West Coast Trainline. You can be in Carlisle, you can be in any of the other coastal towns, you can do that. If you are in [Small Town Name) you are stuck. [College Name], the West Cumbrian college, they've stopped recruiting at [School Name]. They don't go there anymore, because they know that the kids just can't get there. That's not even an option."*

Combined with the fact that distances within and across Cumbria can be large, this variability in access to public transport means that young people will have very different experiences of, and attitudes to, travelling and using public transport, as described by this outreach practitioner:

> *"I think a lot of them rely on parents driving. Students from the more urban places like Workington, Whitehaven will use public transport. The students who aren't, won't. We get a lot of people from the more rural areas that wouldn't ever use a bus. I think part of that is because they are so few and far between anyway, that it's not been a natural part of their life."*

This, in turn, can affect their decision-making around 'moving away' and whether, and where, to pursue HE. Thus, an outreach practitioner commented on how some young people's decision-making about going to University was affected by lack of familiarity with traveling:

> *"I think it's huge. If you've never physically seen a University, how can you aspire to that? How? If you've never left West Cumbria, how can you think yes, it's feasible for me to move to Manchester and do a degree?"*

However, some participants felt quite confident about independent travelling, despite agreeing that their existing experience of travelling travel outside Cumbria tended to be with family or groups of friends because travelling for concerts or shopping is not usually a solitary undertaking:

> *"If you want to travel to a concert or shopping, you're not really going to want to travel by yourself that long distance, really. You're not going to want to independently travel to places. You might have the confidence a bit to travel to closer places by yourself."*

Transport links and remoteness were the most frequently identified barrier by practitioners and professionals who work with Hello Future to support progression of Cumbrian young people to HE. The impact of transport related issues can affect young West Cumbrians in different ways and throughout their progression through school and into decision-making about HE.

Outreach practitioners and education professionals identified eligibility to access HE as a major barrier for some young West Cumbrians. Not all schools are able to offer the full range of subject choices (even at GCSE) and extra-mural activities, for example, music subjects and resources. Some schools in the study area arrange for pupils to travel between themselves to enable them to study subjects they do not offer e.g. Geography, History. However, distance and transport issues for some subjects mean that alternative provision (if it exists) can be inaccessible:

> *"There are schools where music isn't offered because there's no funding for music teachers and instruments and classrooms and things. So that's huge. I think the difference there between West Cumbria and cities is that there are other provisions in cities. Even if you're from a family that couldn't afford to get you music lessons, there will be charities and groups and organisations and opportunities. But there aren't in this area. If there were, it's probably in Workington, not in Silloth."*

The impact of distance and transport continues to affect young people as they move into Sixth Form. Not all schools in West Cumbria have Sixth Forms, so some young people have to change schools or attend college. Free transport for pupils in Sixth Form is only provided to either low-income students or those with learning disabilities. Low income students must also live over three miles from their catchment 6th form or their nearest college offering the vocational area they are studying.

However, not all schools can provide all subject choices or subject combinations. In these cases, young people either have to change the subject they study or change schools to access the subjects they want to study. One participant had to change schools in order to be able to study English Literature 'A' level, which had been dropped by her catchment school. This necessitated a daily round trip of 40 miles to school. A-level subject combination is not considered when determining whether a student qualifies for transport support (Cumbria County Council, 2018, p. 2), therefore students who choose to attend a non-catchment school or college to access specific subjects or subject combinations may have to pay transport costs. For young people from families that cannot afford to pay for private transport, this can mean that students find they do not have eligible entry qualifications for subsequent HE choices.

As young West Cumbrians start to think about choices after school, travelling to University Open Days can be prohibitively expensive. Outreach practitioners report that travel and transport links, including being

able to access Open Days, are one of the most frequently cited barriers to HE mentioned by young people they work with.

In summary, travel and transport are interrelated with distance, and a significant, if highly variable, dimension of the rural and coastal context in West Cumbria through their effects on:

- Access to public transport
- Access to curriculum choice
- Experience of independent travel
- Choices about progression from post-compulsory education

5.3.2 Local job traditions, community attitudes to HE, apprenticeships or jobs and the effect of a single dominant industry

Another characteristic dimension of the West Cumbrian context for WP is the variability in local job traditions and the effect of apprenticeships and jobs at the dominant employer may have on young West Cumbrians' aspirations and choices. Jobs with that employer are highly prized and there is a strong traditional, culture of encouraging young people to get an apprenticeship with the industry, building on the previous local tradition of working in the coal mining or steel industry:

> *"…saying, "He's high up at [dominant industry]", is the ultimate accolade in West Cumbria, absolutely. So definitely status. I think the other one is money ... At age 19, 20, you can be earning £32,000 a year, which, well, where else here is that going to happen? Even with a degree? Realistically? ... The perception is that it's a safe job and it's a life career. It's something you can go into and do forever."*

The dominant employer offers a wide selection of apprenticeships and degree level apprenticeships, which are eagerly sought by young Cumbrians and their families, as reported by this focus group participant:

> *"I think just being in the area, I've heard lots more people promoting apprenticeships rather than trying to get you to University."*

This means that decision-making processes around accessing HE can be significantly influenced by whether young people are considering, or being encouraged to consider, the apprenticeship route, as discussed by an outreach practitioner:

> *"I think one of the saddest things in my job is that I work with very, very talented kids who are achieving really well, who will then say, I'm going to apply for a level 2 apprenticeship because that will get me into [dominant industry]. You're talking about kids who can get As at A Level, saying, "I'll do a level 2", because they know that's the route in. If they get onto level 2, they are in their apprenticeship."*

> *"I think the absolutely huge thing is [dominant industry]. I say this all the time, but I really strongly believe it's the biggest barrier to higher education in this area. So strongly. Because I think it becomes a dichotomy where it's [dominant employer] and earning, or University and debt. That is what people see at this age. How then, even if you know in your heart that you don't want to do the [dominant industry] route, how do you turn your back on that to say actually, I'll take £50,000 debt instead of being on £32,000 aged 18?"*

However, there is also a distance effect so that for some West Cumbrians, apprenticeships within that one industry are just too inaccessible:

"I think it just depends where you live. We live about 50 miles round trip from [dominant employer] so it's not really ideal to go to."

The structure of the West Cumbrian job market is significantly affected by proximity and travel links to the dominant employer. For example, 58.7% of jobs in Copeland depend on that employer's activity compared to 4.4% in Allerdale (Oxford Economics, 2017, p. 21). This means that there are marked variations in traditional jobs in different local areas, as described by this outreach practitioner, talking about the variability within West Cumbria in relation to her work:

"I think a lot of it is to do with the expected industries of those areas. Particularly Silloth and Aspatria - farming, huge farming communities. It's the number one thing. One of the workshops I deliver is about Futures. One of the main things that comes out of there is my family -- farmers, I want to be a farmer. Whereas if you did that same workshop in somewhere in Whitehaven or Workington, it's [dominant industry]. My family work at [dominant industry], I want to go to [dominant industry]. It's almost the expected industries of the towns."

Added to this are different cultural values about work vs. studying. This can be illustrated by this extract from an outreach practitioner, talking about whether going to University is important to people in the area:

"It's a really hard question because for some people, it really is. The pride in some parents and some families when their children get degrees is huge. Equally, I think there still persists this attitude that it's a waste of time, energy and money and why would you do it? There's also a fairly huge attitude around taxpayers' money. Are you going to get a job and start paying it back? It's seen as an easy route as opposed to working. I think people think it's a doss. When I say people, I'm talking about parents and adults."

Thus, each local area has different values about what constitutes a 'good job' or what constitutes a 'good' choice after the end of post compulsory education, depending on the options available and familiar to them, as determined by location, travel links and tradition. Furthermore, the prospect of the relative short-term security of a local job compared, to the uncertainty associated with moving away for a 'costly' degree, the potential benefits of which are both long-term and uncertain, clearly plays an important role in young West Cumbrians' decision-making processes:

"I think because there's a lot of local businesses around here, it encourages people to just stay and go and work at [dominant industry] or at the local shops instead of going away to University and spending so much money on the future."

For example, farming is feature of West Cumbrian life which can have major effects on young West Cumbrians decision-making about accessing HE:

"I think it depends what your parents do. Say if you were a farmer, they're not really going to encourage you to go and do a degree in design or something. They would want you to stay and help on the farm."

Local cultural attitudes to debt can significantly influence decision-making around accessing HE, as captured in this focus group extract of a discussion between participants talking about why living here might discourage people from going to University:

"I think it's just how much it costs to go and considering what family incomes are around here, it's hard to try and do it."

"And loads of debt that comes along with it."

"Yes, it's not even like you can just pay it off and be done with it. It takes quite a long time, from what I've heard, to pay it off."

Indeed, the single most frequent barrier to HE identified by young Cumbrians (including some from wards in this study area) during a session for the National Citizen Scheme, led by local outreach practitioners, was debt/expense of HE and the stigma attached to debt (with the second most frequent being travel/transport).

The cost of going to University was identified by focus group participants as one of the biggest difficulties faced by young people who are thinking about going to University, although this was also associated with anxieties about 'moving away':

It's just money, I'd say. Trying to get the money to go and just being secure when you're over there".

"It's the money as well. I think personally I would rather go to college or something than do sixth form and University, just because it's stressful. When you know down the line it will take a while and a lot of money"

5.4 Socio-cultural factors

5.4.1 Parent's experience of/attitude to education and HE

Parental experiences of and attitudes to education and Higher Education and whether it is 'worth' the investment can have a significant effect on young West Cumbrians' decision-making about HE:

"None of my family apart from two of my cousins went to University, so I wasn't really that bothered about going. They've all got quite good paying jobs and they've all -- they're all set for life, so I don't -- they're not pushing us into it, but I know that if they'd gone, they would have pushed us into it."

Outreach practitioners and education-related professionals reported family attitudes as a major barrier to accessing higher education for young West Cumbrians, ranging from families who just had no prior experience of University through to those who actively oppose young people's aspiration to go to University. Work with young Cumbrians participating in National Citizen Service and conducted by West Cumbrian outreach practitioners also identified family disapproval as a frequent significant barrier.

Outreach practitioners have noticed some shifts in attitudes as young people become more familiar with seeing peers go off to University but note that for their parents, going off to University may still be an unfamiliar concept:

"I think attitudes for students are shifting. When you look at that generational difference it's quite huge. I think most students now will know somebody who has been to University, whether that's an older cousin or somebody a few years above them at school, they'll be watching a cohort of their classmates going off every year to different universities, which parents wouldn't have seen. For parents, that wouldn't have been a thing, whereas now I think schools try to introduce it as a natural step. For parents it's still quite an unnatural step."

However, many parents are supportive as reported by participants in the focus groups:

> *" I think sometimes I maybe feel a bit of a push from my parents to go to University, because they just want the best for you. They want you to be as qualified as you can be, so you can get a good job."*

> *"I think if your mum and dad didn't have as many qualifications, or didn't go to University, I don't think they'd be able to give as much help, but they would maybe encourage you to go there more. Because they'd want you to have a better education. They'd encourage you to go so that you would be happy and know that you wanted to go because you'd have that qualification and that extra advantage."*

5.4.2 Sources and availability of knowledge about HE and other options after the end of PCE

Focus group participants perceived that they started to receive information about apprenticeships from schools and companies much earlier than information about HE choices. In relation to living in the area, participants were asked where they got messages from about University and apprenticeships.

> *"On parents evening and that. They get apprenticeship people from (company name) and you can sit and talk with them and have meetings with them. Whereas with universities, I've not really seen that. The only reason that I personally would know about universities is just from cousins saying what it was like. There's been more information given to us about apprenticeships than about University".*

Any information that Year 11 participants had received about Universities was reported to come from family members or friends:

> *"Family members, and then I had a careers meeting with that lady and she told me quite a lot about it then. But that's about it".*

One participant described the difficulties of accessing information in rural areas and acknowledged the importance of 'who you know':

> *It's a bit about who you know, as well. If you know people that work in companies that can give you the information that's good for you. But some other people don't have those things, so it is quite difficult. Especially in rural areas, because there's not a lot of resources really".*

Another participant highlighted the role of family and friends in helping her decide whether to stay on at school and pursue A-levels:

> *"I know I was looking at leaving school after I've done my GCSEs, but when I looked into it and I spoke to a couple of people, they advised me to stay on and to do my A-levels. When I spoke to them and when they've looked into what I'm going to do, they've said it would be -- it's in my best interests to stay on and do my A-levels".*

Participants also identified how the knowledge and past experiences of people, and particularly their parents, affected the advice they offered:

> *"I've spoken to different people about advice on what to do and I've had some people say to me, "Uni was the best time of my life, you get to do all this." And other people have said to me, "You'd be daft not to go down the apprenticeship route. So, I think it just depends*

on people's past experiences. My mum or dad never went to uni or anything but they would be supportive of me going to uni. They personally think that for what I want to do, I would be better to stay around here, because they know of opportunities".

Current knowledge of PCE choices and employment opportunities and requirements was also mentioned by one participant as a limitation of parental guidance:

"They went to University, that was their only choice. Maybe they see that as the only choice, they don't look at the other options. They don't really understand the other options that well. So parents, I can see pushing you a little bit more towards University than maybe if you asked a friend. They'll say like, there's these options. If you asked a teacher, they might give you more options, but there can be a difference at times. It just depends on who you ask".

The quality of school experiences can affect young peoples' aspiration formation as illustrated by one outreach officer's experience of working with young West Cumbrians:

"I think students are hugely editing themselves out. First of all, I think it's to do with the University as a progression from school issue. Therefore, if school doesn't agree with you or if you're not naturally book smart or if you're really intelligent, but it just doesn't translate well into the structure of a GCSE or an A Level, I think that absolutely changes people's perspectives".

Furthermore, many young West Cumbrians continue to regard HE as something exclusively for very clever people, as reported by the same outreach officer:

*"I think that attitude still persists that I need ten A*s, when that's absolutely not the case".*

Asked about when aspiration formation started in her experience with working with young West Cumbrians, she described how she felt it started for both children and teachers from the earliest age and that the socio-cultural environment children grew up in was a formative aspect of this:

"I think -- and this is really, really sad -- I think as tiny children. I think it's the rule and an entire structure that's made up of teachers and parents and communities, of comments and accents and clothes and everything… I'll always remember, in my primary school there was a boy in my year. He was really badly behaved, and he had an awful -- he was just in an awful situation. It was known from that age by parents and teachers, he'll end up like his parents. It's that fatalism. That it's decided and it's fixed. But it's not. That's the hardest thing in this area, I think."

6 Conclusions

This study has identified a range of dimensions of the rural context in West Cumbria that may be important to young people who are thinking about accessing HE or other choices following the end of PCE.

The thematic analysis of data was framed by a conceptual model used by Friesen and Purc-Stephenson to identify the interacting factors at work in potential student applicants.

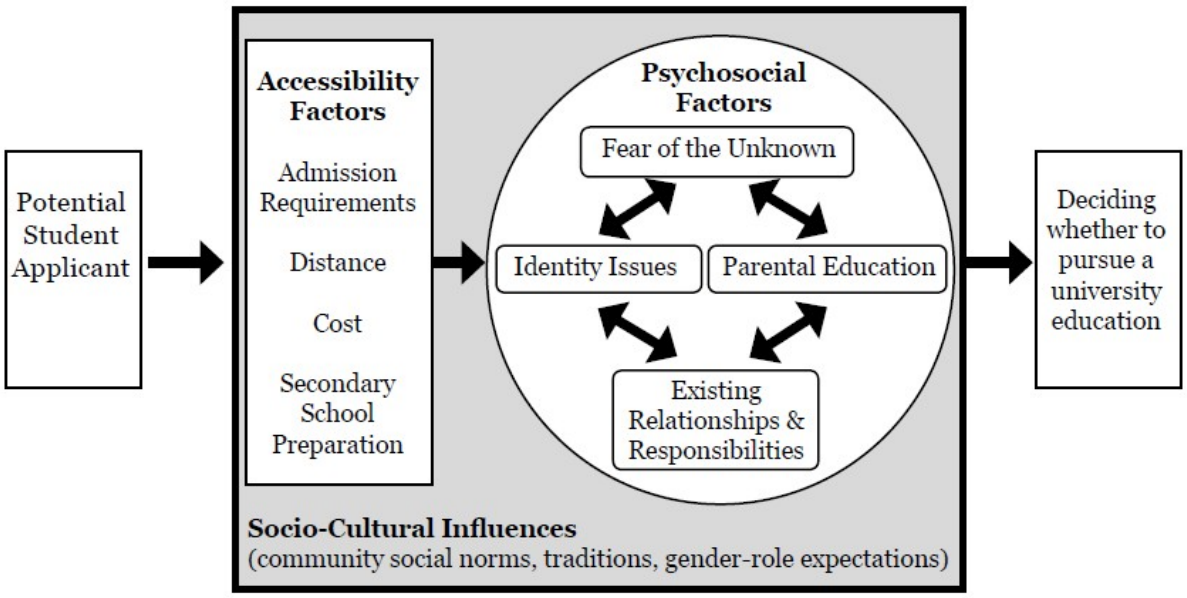

Figure 9 Conceptual model showing interacting personal, social and cultural factors influencing rural young people's' decision-making about accessing HE (from Friesen and Purc-Stephenson, 2016, p.149).

The themes identified from this qualitative research suggested that accessibility factors and psychosocial factors are potentially more interlinked in the rural context of West Cumbria than in other geographical contexts. For example, infrastructure (accessibility) can affect the range of subjects available at a school (accessibility) which in turn is embedded within historic and cultural expectations of what constitutes a 'good job' for that area (psychosocial) and the existing responsibilities a potential applicant has (psychosocial). In particular, the notion of 'distance' raised a number of interlinking dimensions which were rooted in both accessibility and psychosocial factors. Thus, the data analysed here may question the linearity of Friesen and Purc-Stephenson's model, even if the conceptual categories are a useful map for the themes the data raised.

In this light, the following conclusions can be drawn from this research project:

- West Cumbria is also characterised by a highly variable patchwork effect in the local environment. Thus, young people can have completely different experiences of these dimensions of rural West Cumbria, depending on precisely where they live.

- The remoteness of West Cumbria and distance within and beyond Cumbria plays a significant role in young people's decision-making. Distance is experienced both physically and psychologically. Thus, distance as a physical dimension affects young people's access to educational and employment opportunities throughout their educational development. The data suggests that distance as a psychological dimension affects young people's willingness to leave the area to pursue HE and employment opportunities elsewhere. This aspect operates through restrictions on access to opportunities to develop independent travelling skills and repeated experiences of new situations and people. Distance also maintains and reinforces strong bonds to family, community and place which can have a profound effect on aspiration and expectation formation and, ultimately, choices after the end of PCE. Thus, 'moving away' to pursue HE at distant Universities is

often regarded as a permanent move, carrying risks of breaking family and community ties and being changed by the experience so that they might not want to come back.

- Gender can be a highly significant dimension of the rural West Cumbrian context and can be closely linked to identity in rural areas. In combination with gendered traditional industry norms and the structure of the local job market, young West Cumbrian males and their parents, are more likely to favour locally based apprenticeship or employment options, as this avoids the risks of HE, fulfils perceptions of male identity ideals and enables males to access earnings, security, community status and stay in the area. The enhanced pay and rewards offered by the dominant industry reinforces existing community values of the merits of apprenticeships.

- However, young West Cumbrian females, and their parents, may be more likely to seek HE or training as there are perceived to be fewer employment opportunities available to girls, unless they are interested in engineering related subjects when the opportunities with the dominant employer are equally available to males and females. Female participants in this research reported experiencing tensions between their educational and employment aspirations and their desire to remain in their communities, maintaining close family, social and community relationships. Both the literature and research suggest they are potentially more likely to focus on perceived negative social aspects of moving away to pursue HE or other end of PCE choices and to adapt their aspirations and expectations to avoid this; by, for example, choosing subjects at the closest University. This may also include creative ways of finding alternative ways to achieve their aspirations, such as pursuing an interest in child psychology through joining the police, rather than going to University to study.

- The attitude to HE and ability of parents to support young people's aspirations is likely to be affected by traditions of low educational qualification, unemployment and intergenerational socio-economic deprivation that is characteristic of many areas in West Cumbria. Parents attitudes to HE and ability to support their children's aspirations range from active disapproval to enthusiastic support, even if they do not have personal or current knowledge or experience of the options available.

- The low population, sparse distribution and distance and travel characteristics of West Cumbria may limit the access Young West Cumbrians have to numerous and diverse social networks which may, in turn, limit aspirations and expectation formation. As such, there is an atypical dependency on teachers, careers and outreach organisations and their existing close networks of family and friends for information and advice about choices after the end PCE. The timing of information about apprenticeships tends to be somewhat earlier than that about other choices, which may also affect aspiration and expectation formation.

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Annexes

Annex 1.Summary of data on 'Enablers' and 'Barriers' to accessing HE in Cumbria collected from practitioners and professionals

Annex 2. Hello Future Theory of Change for outreach activities

Annex 3. Catchment maps for schools serving the study areas

Annex 1. Summary of data on 'Enablers' and 'Barriers' to accessing HE in Cumbria collected from practitioners and professionals

ENABLERS	Count	BARRIERS	Count
Teachers and school environment	6	Transport	7
Home life and environment	6	Socio-cultural environment	5
Knowledge and information	5	Knowledge and information	4
Financial	3	Family attitudes	3
Personal motivators	2	First attenders	2
Socio-political environment	1	Cost	2
Role models	1	Remoteness	2
Skills and attributes of individuals	1	Personal characteristics	2
Equality and access issues	1	Equality and access issues	1
Quality relationships	1	Disability and equal opportunity issues	1
	27		29

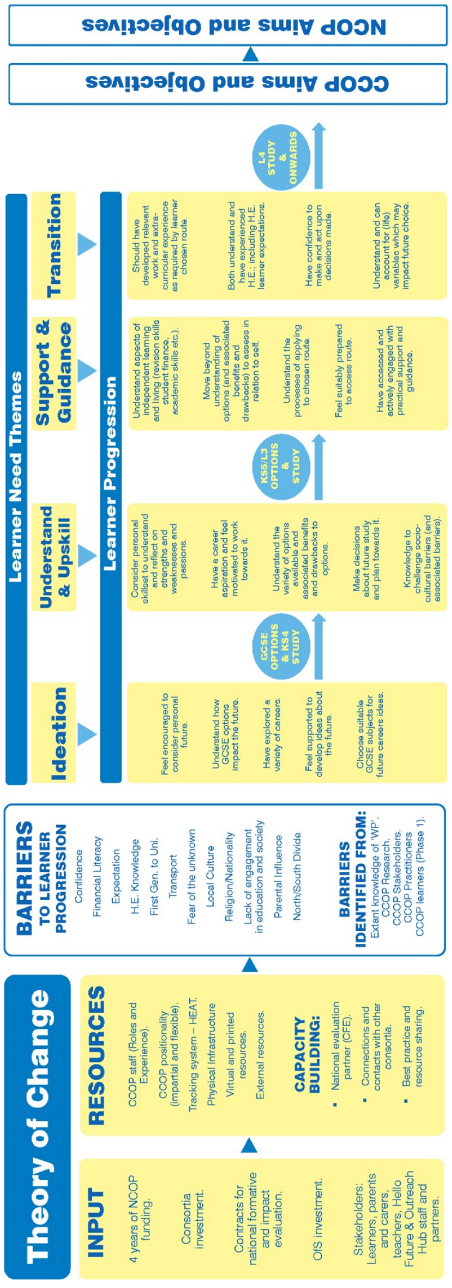
ENABLERS (22 sticky notes listing 27 enablers)			BARRIERS (24 sticky notes identifying 29 barriers)		
Provisional category	Response	Professional background	Provisional category	Response	Professional background
Teachers and school environment (6)	School talks		Transport (7)	Transport links	
	School			Travel including cost of travel/rural areas	Hello Future graduate intern
	School support (Sixth Form teachers)			Travel eg access to Open Days being far away	Outreach
	Teachers and school staff who encourage students	Outreach		Transport	
	Teachers who have faith in you	Outreach		Transport	
	Teacher attitude			Travel	
Home life (6)	Stable home life	Education charity manager		Not wanting to travel far	Student services/Careers
	Supportive parents		Socio-cultural environment (5)	Discriminatory stereotypes	
	Supportive parents			Expectation of communities on young people	Evaluation & data
	Support from family (& encouragement)			Lack of culture and diversity	
	Supportive environment			History of worklessness	Student services/Careers
	Healthy environment			Peer pressure	Student services/Careers
Knowledge and information (5)	Impartial advice and guidance for a wide range of options	Outreach	Knowledge and information (4)	Lack of awareness of career routes	
	Supporting informed choices			Lack of information in options and the process	
	Exposure/experience of wide range of career options/pathways	Hello Future		Lack of wide variety/access to info	
	Good links to CE IAG programme			Distinguished pathways	Evaluation & data
	Clear information and guidance taking you through, into and prior HE	Hello Future Graduate Intern	Family attitudes (3)	Family opposing your decision	Outreach
Financial (3)	Bursaries	Outreach		Unsupportive parents	
	Funding			Family situation – breakdown – young carers	
	Some financial support		First attenders (2)	Family who have never gone to University	
Personal motivators(2)	Prove people wrong – be the first person to go in your family/village			No family experience	

	Able to do what you want afterwards	
Socio-political environment (1)	Progressive socio-economic policies	
Role models (1)	Positive role models	
Personal characteritics (1)	Increasing/building resilience	
Equality and access issues (1)	Alternative learning conditions	
Quality relationships (1)	Quality relationships	

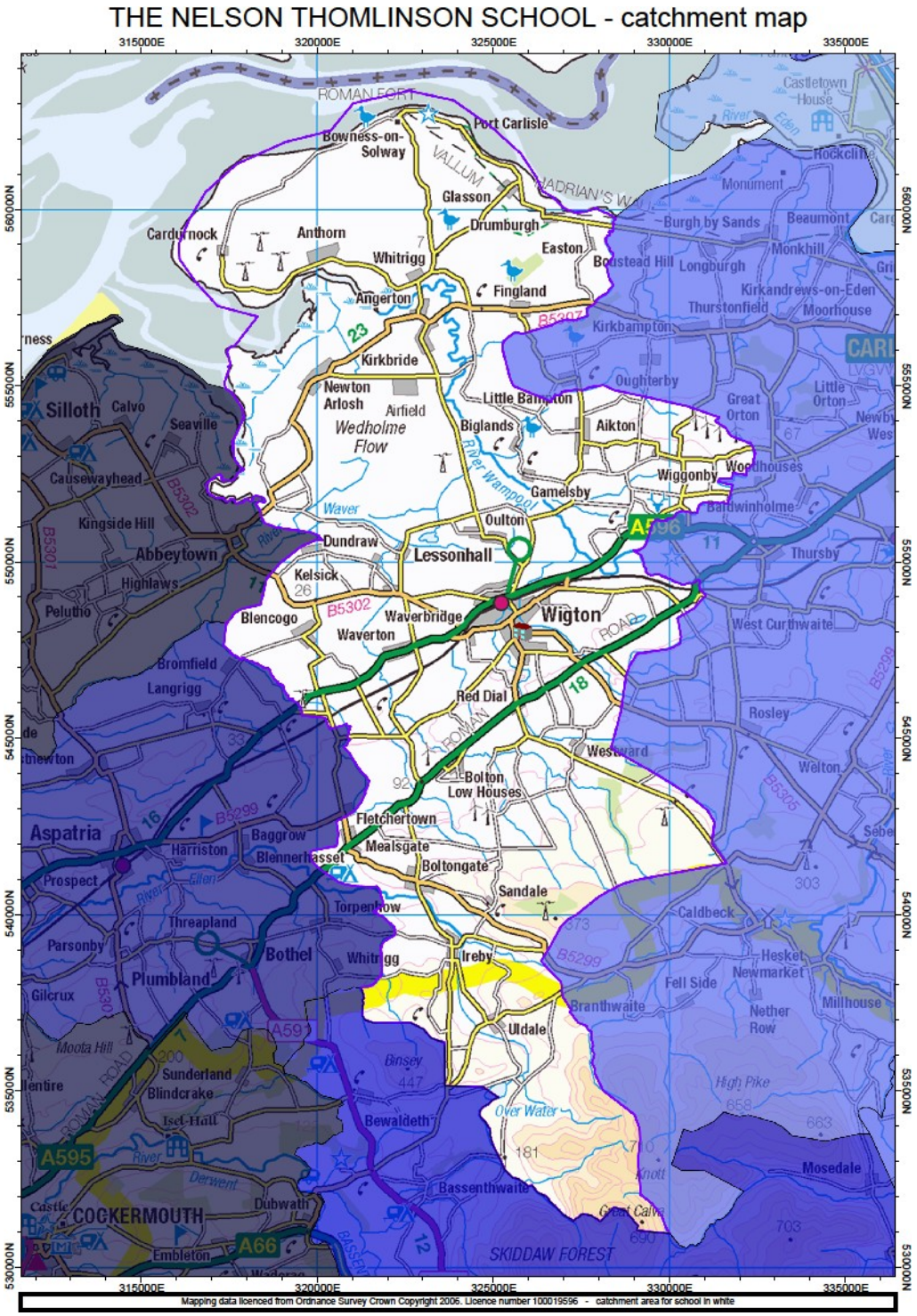
Cost (2)	Money	
	Cost	
Remoteness (2)	Isolated	
	Isolation	
Skill and attributes of individuals (2)	Lack of confidence/self-worth	
	Apathy	Student services/Careers
Equality & access issues (1)	Eligibility to access	
Disability and equality issues (1)	Perceived/lack of resources for mental/physical disabilities & equal opportunity	

Table 2 - Raw data

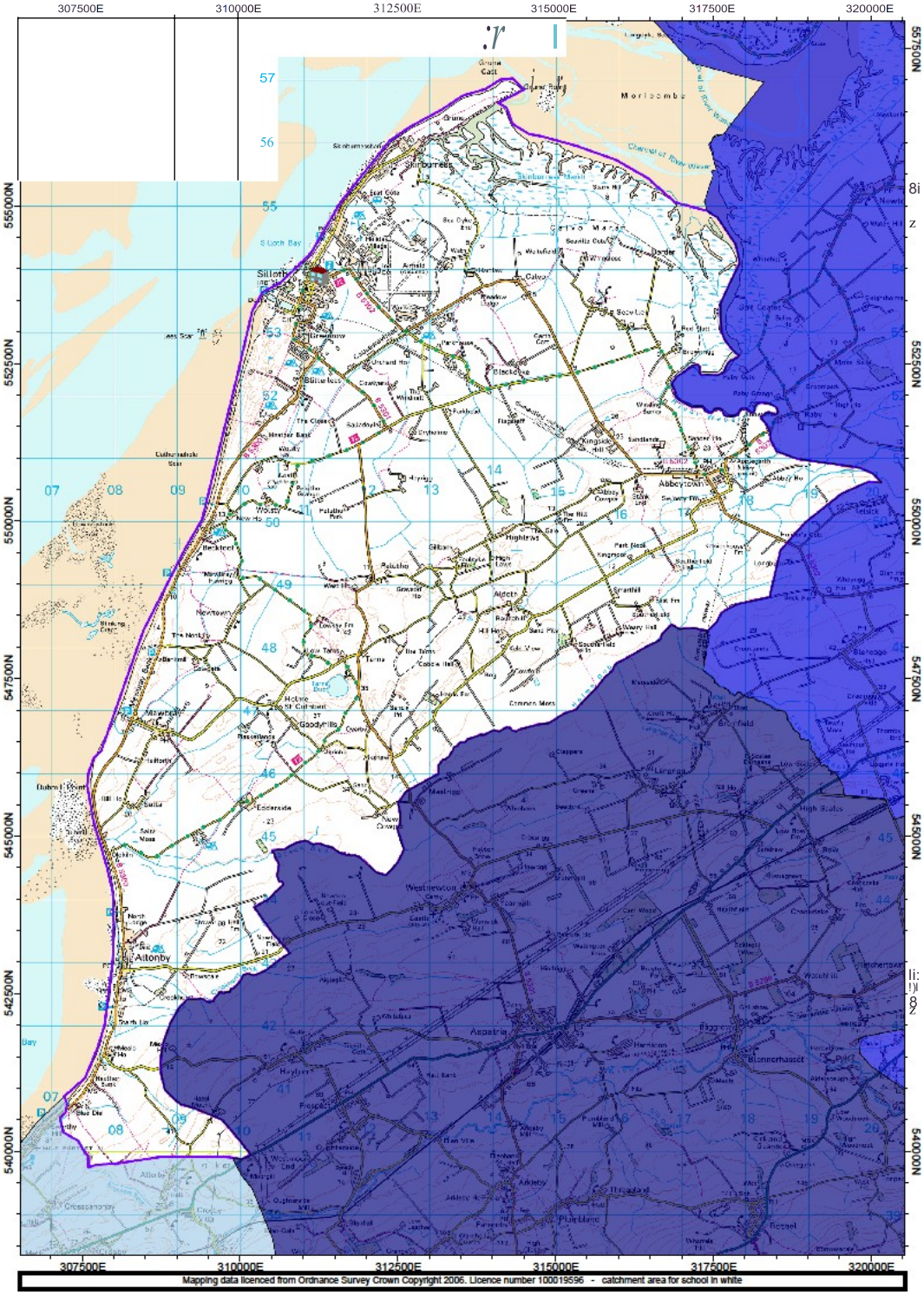
Annex 2. Hello Future Theory of Change for outreach activities



Annex 3. Catchment maps for schools serving the study areas



SOLWAY COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE - catchment map



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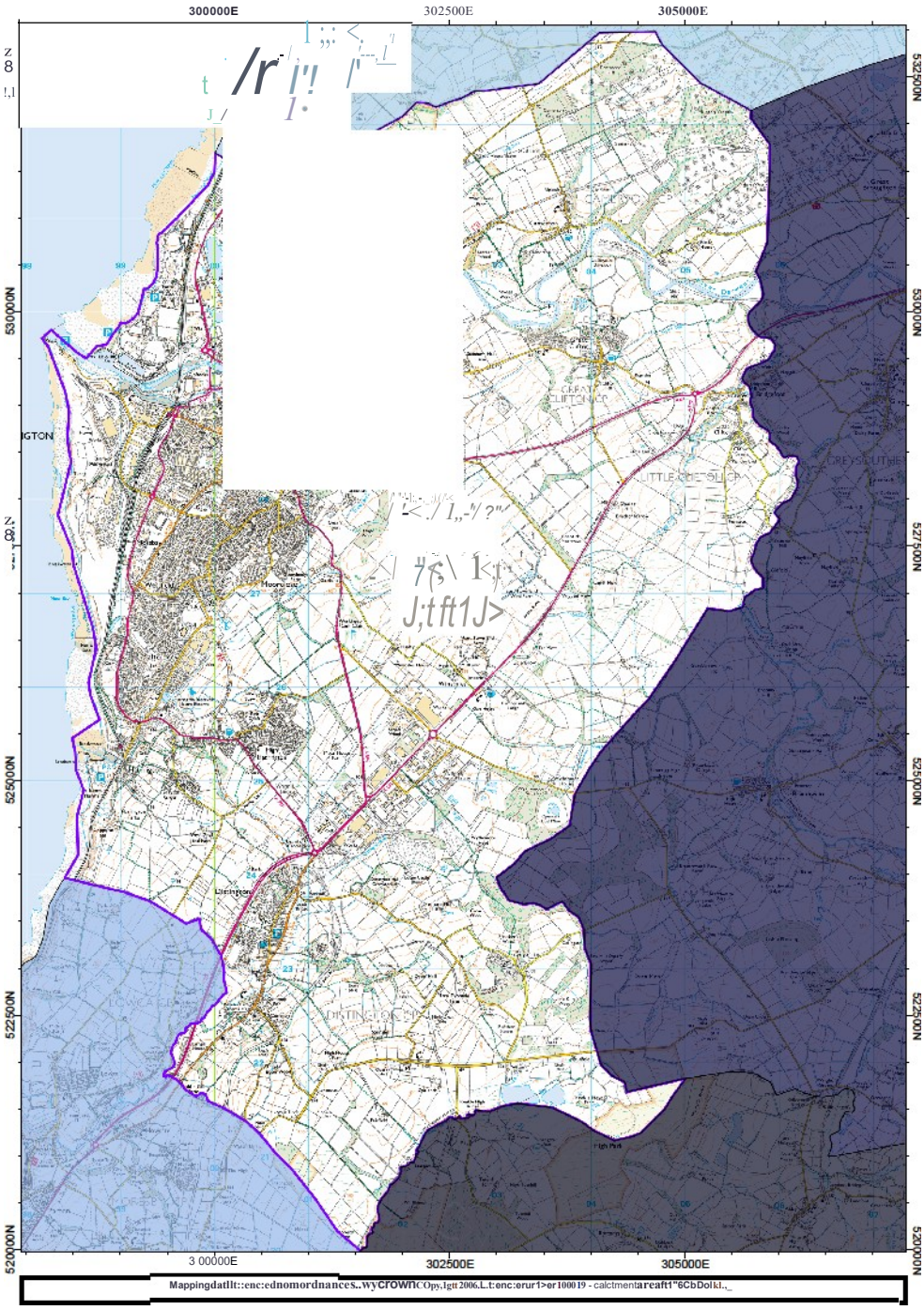

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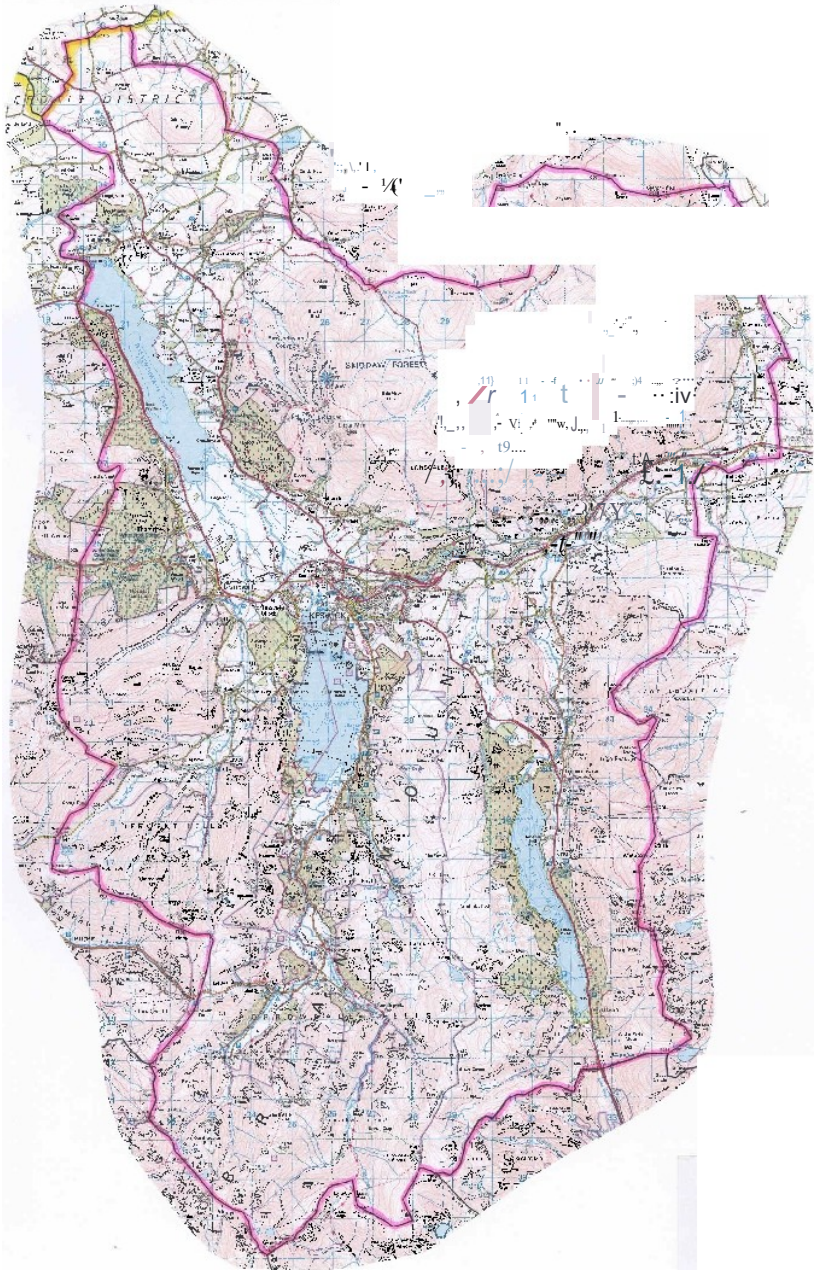
County Council

CATCHMENT AREAMAP
KESWICK SCHOOL



BEACO N HILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL - catchment map